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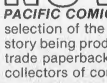

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COMICS SCENE

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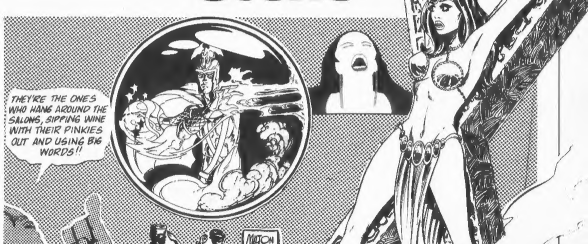

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ABOUT THE COVER: In a world gripped by deadly Ice, Tarn, a young warrior, fights off a vicious pack of wolves. This thrilling scene is from Fire and Ice, the new animated film from Ralph Bakshi and Frank Frazetta. Our exclusive coverage begins on page 25. FIRE AND ICE © 1983, Ralph Bakshi Productions; WARLORD® and © 1983 DC Comics Inc.; TERRY AND THE PIRATES © 1983 Tribune Syndicate Co.

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Word Balloons

Superheroes are not Alternative!

The promise of a truly alternative marketplace is slowly being strangled by short-sighted people. Fans and distributors in the direct-only arena are forcing publishers to deliver one superhero after another, abandoning black and white anthology magazines or anything that is "different."

As the market slowly began expanding in the late 1970s, black and white graphic novels like *Sabre* demonstrated the untapped potential of "different" comics. Readers were promised, in a few short years, the appearance of Westerns, Detectives and Real People in comics—and fewer superheroes. For a time, it seemed as if that promise would be kept, but something happened. Success.

More and more companies and individuals began to publish their own comics and magazines. Comics shops tried to carry everything until, suddenly, shelf space has become a rarity today. As Marvel and DC keep sending out more direct-only books and new companies like Red Circle, First and Pacific keep issuing new titles, the smaller, less-experienced publishers are discovering their orders dropping while demand for black and white material becomes non-existent.

Distributors, like Capital, Seagate, Longhorn, Pacific and Bud Plant now explain that black and white won't work. To demonstrate that belief, they only ordered, at best, 6000 copies of Fantaco's *Deja Vu #1*, a lovely package offering us vintage reprints from Jeff Jones, Berni Wrightson and Michael Kaluta.

These distributors seem to be asking for more heroic material, be it space opera or straight superhero adventure. To remain commercially viable, publishers are giving up what they want to do and are signing up comics creators to produce super-books. *Eclipse Magazine*, a truly innovative showcase, is ending after eight eclectic issues because of this perception on the part of distributors. No more offbeat stories from Larry Rippee, or Howard Cruse, let's bring in more long-underwear types for *Eclipse Monthly*. Will *Ragamuffins*, the delightful strip from Don McGregor and Gene Colan be able to tug at the heartstrings the same way in color? Sadly, something will be missing.

Len Wein complained in January that fans approach him at conventions and ask why DC isn't publishing comics other than the usual superhero fare. He inquired whether those fans would buy a new Mystery book or a new Western book. No. Then, what's the use?

First, distributors must start thinking beyond super-powers and secret identities. Creators want to try different genres, but can't find a market. Yet, a Walt Simonson Western or a Frank Miller Mystery would sell and be very entertaining.

Secondly, fans should stop showing their biases and sample new things. All it takes is a few minutes to look at something unusual at a convention or in a comics shop. Sample something new at least once a week—just because it doesn't have a mutant or a splashily costumed lead doesn't invalidate it as being entertaining.

Finally, credit must be given to those various publishers who have enough guts and vision to continue to publish these variant books: *Twisted Tales* (now, with the demise of *House of Mystery*, the only mystery book on the market), *Ms. Tree*, *Jon Sable*, *Groo the Wanderer*, *Love and Rockets*, *Gates of Eden* and *Voyages*. Without them, there would be no difference between the direct market and the newsstand. Support those books or that beautiful dream of a viable comics alternative will die.

* * *

Odds & Ends: Just a few things to bring us all up to date. Marvel Comics changed the *Killraven* story from a serial for *Epic Illustrated* into a Graphic Novel, due out in April. The change in format and scheduling prevented us from previewing the work, but, let me tell you that it's some of the nicest artwork from P. Craig Russell in a long while and Don McGregor's story looks very exciting. Also, at the last minute, Jim Starlin was unable to write his "Guest Spot" for us, but he'll do so at some other time. Finally, if you want to understand what really happened at the Marvel Press Conference regarding the reverse issue of *Spider-Man*, please carefully read Gary Groth's editorial in *Comics Journal #79*, now on sale. It's a must read for any fan interested in the truth.

—Robert Greenberger

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Lettering

Thanks!

Thank you all for the belated anniversary wishes! We were flooded with them after issue seven went on sale and we appreciate all the kind words. Mark your calendars so you don't forget next November marks year two! Anyway, keep those cards and letters coming, we love reading everything we receive. As always, the address remains

Lettering
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

Remembering Gene Day

Dear Sir,

. . . The month before he died, Gene Day told me about the problems and frustrations he had encountered as he was pushed out of Marvel and, worst of all, forced off *Master of Kung-Fu*. To hear the story from Doug Moench's point of view in COMICS SCENE #7 had an added poignancy for me. No one was better suited to comment on Gene's life and career, a career which Moench both shared and witnessed. Speaking of Moench, Gene once said, in a tone of wonder and delight, "We're too much alike." As if the partnership was a crazy and clever trick of fate.

At the risk of sounding as if I am celebrating ritual mourning for the loss of my favourite comic, I must add that I wholeheartedly agree with Howard Zimmerman's editorial on Marvel's current policies and the cancellation of *Master of Kung-Fu*. Most of the recent changes at Marvel have included the loss of favourite writers and artists, a regression from sophistication to juvenilia, and simplistic 'action' masquerading as simplicity. No thanks.

Elizabeth Holden
120 Lewis St., Apt. 2
Ottawa, Ontario Canada
K2P 0S7

Dear Robert and Howard:

. . . I have just finished reading your various testimonies to Gene Day in COMICS SCENE #7, and I find myself slipping back into the terrible black mood I found myself in when I first learned about his death over a month ago.

I met Gene Day at a small comic convention held at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel here in Montreal in November of 1981. I had heard of him vaguely before, but since, at the time, the idea of buying a comic-book based on a kung-fu character was ludicrous to me, I saw nothing of his work but a single one-page sketch he did for the Captain Canuck Summer Special. I approached Gene, a little nervously, at the con, and asked if I might have a brief interview with him for my fan publication Orion. Gene said "Sure!" in such an open and friendly way, that I immediately began to regret not being more familiar with his work. The interview with Gene lasted the better part of an afternoon (I was lucky enough to have my dealers' table placed right next to where he was seated) and stretched to more than 28 pages typed. So much for a "brief chat." Gene impressed me as few other people I have ever met did. His honesty, his integrity, his sheer good nature, and, of course, his incredible talent made me feel as if I had known him for a long time after that one afternoon. Even my father, who knows about as much about comics as I know about Administration, came away from a short talk with Gene with a very high regard for the man.

During the course of the interview, Gene heaped praise on Marvel Comics and the people that run it. He chastised other comic pros who aired their dirty laundry in public, and he chastised certain fandom publications which seemed intent on digging for dirt at Marvel to the exclusion of all else. He told me that he had actually turned down an earlier offer to jump to DC because he felt he owed Marvel too much. If what I have been reading in COMICS SCENE and elsewhere about Marvel's treatment of Gene is true, well then. . . draw your own conclusions.

I was speaking on the phone to a friend of mine on September 24, 1982. I was feeling pretty good. After wrestling with various difficulties for over a year, I had finally managed to get Orion back on track, and was looking forward to the publication of my second issue, which included the interview with Gene. I hung up the phone. Barely a minute later it rang again: It was the clerk from the local comic stores. "I have some bad news Mark," he began. "Gene Day has died." I was silent for one moment, and then I'm afraid I screamed into the phone. I had never done that before in my life, and I actually never believed that anyone really did that outside of movies and comics. I was stunned, and all the momentum I had built up with my publication to the point seemed to just dissipate. It was almost impossible to believe; I had spoken on the phone with Gene barely a couple of weeks earlier, and although he sounded rather down, he spoke with enthusiasm about his new projects with DC and Fantagraphics. I didn't know Gene well, and yet I felt I did. His death affected me in such a way that I almost felt a very close friend or relative had passed on. What is really frustrating is the sense of "cut-off" that Gene's passing has left. As Doug Moench said so eloquently, Gene had not yet reached his full potential as an artist, and I was looking forward with great eagerness to his work at DC, most particularly on Batman. Now we'll never see it. Damn.

Writing Gene Day's obituary was perhaps the most difficult task I've ever undertaken, and one which I would much rather have never been forced to do. Goodbye Gene, I'll miss you too.

Mark Shainblum
5708 Merrimac Rd.
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H4W 1S6

On Issue Seven

Dear COMICS SCENE

. . . You want feedback. You got it. CS #7 was everything a comics nut could ask for. First of all, congratulations on your premiere year in the comic biz. This mag is a pro-zine in every sense of the word. You don't know what a relief it is to finally have a magazine that deals with the graphic story medium without juvenile and just plain boring quips of a supposed know-it-all or the stupid arguing that fills page after page of The Comics Journal.

I don't know how you do it with a bi-monthly publishing schedule, but you have once again scooped the weeklies and the monthlies on the latest comics news. It is an extremely exciting time for the industry and the hobby and there was much good news to report.

At last an informative article on George Perez. Even with all the fanfare over the *New Teen Titans*, I've still felt that this man is one of the most underrated creators in comics today.

Bill D. Middleton
1010 Connelly
Clovis, NM 88101

Dear Staff,

. . . I was very amazed and very impressed with your first anniversary issue. I haven't enjoyed a magazine before as much as I've enjoyed COMICS SCENE.

You know what I liked most? Need I say it? The special preview on *Elfquest Book 2*! I bet my bottom dollar J.R.R. Tolkien is turning green with envy (not to mention me, especially since I'm trying to start my own comic!).

Perez's notebook was an aspect of detail used to its fullest! Spectacular! There was nothing wrong with your anniversary issue whatsoever.

Keefe R. Royal
120 Nottingham Dr.
Bwk, GA 31520

We're all very pleased with the Perez Notebook. Diane Cook, talented senior designer, executed the four page section and here's a chance to thank her in public.

Dear Robert Greenberger and Howard Zimmerman,

. . . Okay, here it is: Happy First Anniversary. Sad as it seems, when people can write about abortion, gun control, and supply side economics, lighter issues take a back seat. However, I would guess your readers wouldn't consider writing about the aforementioned issues either, so some very deserving magazine editors are hereby offered my congratulations. (This is no way lets the rest of you guys off the hook. Why haven't you written to your elected officials about issues? It does have an effect, and becoming informed about issues can only help.)

I think it might do me good to have an intelligent letter published, since in my two published letters I spent the time extolling love for the magazines (STARLOG and COMICS SCENE). Kudos to Mr. Cruse for his two latest columns (#'s 6&7). He brought up some excellent points about the "Disney Myth."

I loved your direct sales article (which is a lie; I enjoyed it and I learned from it). One question, though: What on earth does DGS, on the cover of STARLOG magazines, stand for? Is it your distributor?

Tell Uncle Bob I sympathize with him. (You might mention that his magazine is looking better and better, but you don't have to.)

John Zipperer
417 S. 28 st.
Manitowoc, WI 54220

DGS stands for our overseas distributor. If any of you have trouble finding COMICS SCENE on newsstands or in comics shops, drop us a note and we'll get right on it.

Dear Talented People,

. . . Your article on Direct Sales in issue #7 moved me to comment. My first contact with Direct Marketing came when I went to buy my copy of *Camelot 3000* at my favorite outlet. It was not there. It took a while to determine that this was being sold direct, mostly through comics shops, and was thus unavailable to the people who run this store because they deal with an independent distributer. So far as I know there was no comics shop in Saskatoon, which is not, quite frankly, one of the most up to date or cosmopolitan of cities. Fortunately, Saskatoon has surprised me and I have found not one but two comics shops in this city. Despite this, I intend to buy most of my comics at my favorite store. Why? Because these people are my friends, and I feel a loyalty towards them.

Despite my loyalty to my friends, I am afraid that I see Direct Marketing as the way of the future. When I paid my first visit to a comics shop, I was shocked, surprised, and delighted, each within seconds of the other. I had found Nirvana. Your expert has also shown me a dark vision, or at least had it made apparent to me. It is in the story of Bob's Sweet Shop. There kids are passing over the comics to spend (waste?) their money on the most visible element of our developing technology, the Video Game. I am 28 years old, and I do not see that many young people buying comic books. Maybe I am not looking at the right time or the right place, but I just don't see them. It is a horrific vision. If the kids do not develop the love of this marvelous medium in the way that we developed it then perhaps it is doomed. Despite Carol Clark's belief that Video Games are here to stay, however, I believe that the end for comics is not near, and that the love of this marvelous visual medium, the comic book will be reborn.

Brent McKee
901 Ave. TN.
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Canada S7L 3B9

More on Marvel

Dear COMICS SCENE,

. . . I don't care if my letter is printed or not. I just want COMICS SCENE to hear this: I totally agree with Mark Brett's letter. Every mag I read with articles on comics, I read little remarks about how great Marvel is. Well, gag me with a spoon! I'm sick and tired of Marvel bragging about how famous and fabulous they are. Well, the day they can prove that, is the day I start collecting their comics!

John Mark Lapham
1555 Mimosa
Abilene, TX 79603

Editor:

. . . Please leave Jim Shooter alone. It seems every time someone leaves Marvel, there is a major rush to say nasty things about him (Shooter). In fairness, I am not a fan of his, but, I am tired of hearing constant criticism. Not all of Marvel seems dissatisfied with Jim. In fact, some of the best things to come from Marvel have appeared under his editorship.

Among them, the "back to the basics" including the *Fantastic Four*, a return to greatness of the *Avengers*, and a new excellence in *Daredevil*, the *X-Men*, and *Doctor Strange*. We have also seen the arrival of *Indiana Jones*, the *New Mutants*, and *Dreadstar*. It must be pointed out that Shooter has rode hard over some major turkeys also, but by and large, his track record is good . . . give him the room to work. With the anti-Shooter feeling of this issue, you stand a good chance to become the next *Comics Journal*. I hope this does not happen.

Lest you think this diatribe is all negative: the Shooter criticism aside, yours is the fairest and most professional of all comics related magazines, as an almost-journalist I applaud that.

Also, artists are nice, and you can print their pretty pictures, but how about an article or two on some writers?

Finally, June of '83 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Doc Savage. How about something to commemorate this event?

Charles Cockett
353 McComb Ave.
Cheyene, WY 82007

Coming in issue 11, on sale in July, we'll have a special look at Doc Savage, courtesy of Savage expert Will Murray. As for writers, how does a two-part talk with Chris Claremont sound?

People,

. . . You want some letters coming in? OK, then print this little comment: Marvel stinks.

Allen Phillips
Holland, MI

Political Scene?

Dear Editor,

. . . Congratulations, belatedly, for your first anniversary. Your coverage this past year has been very good. One area of cartooning, though, has been completely omitted so far; that is the area of editorial cartoonists. Please don't forget those canny men and women who combine wit, wisdom and sometimes folly in succinct, one-panel cartoons.

To rectify this situation, I suggest you begin by profiling a brilliantly witty cartoonist from this area: Tom Toles, who is presently on the staff of the *Buffalo News*. His style and his opinions make me think of him as the Harlan Ellison of cartooning. I would be interested to find out whether others agree with me.

Andrew Laubacher
3858 Gaines Basin Rd.
Albion, NY 14411

Political cartoons are something we've been wanting to cover since issue one but we have never gotten around to it. If we do political cartoonists, we will probably focus on some of the better, but lesser known cartoonists such as Tom Darcy from Newsday. What do you readers think, should we cover this area?

Creating New Talents

Dear Bob,

. . . Last year I joined the army to help finance the rest of my schooling (I have two years of commercial art under my belt). Since I've been in, I've rarely lifted a pencil. But since I've started reading COMICS SCENE, I've finally broken down and started drawing again. Articles like "Breaking In" (#4) and Creating the Comics have been an inspiration and have given me several ideas on how to better my style.

PFC Galen C. Kogut
CSC 2/72nd Armor
APO SF 96224
Camp Casey, Korea

Dear COMICS SCENE,

. . . I must express my whole hearted joy on your Creating the Comics series. I'm sure I'm not the only aspiring comic book artist that appreciates what you've done with it. A high point in the issue.

One question: Who drew Superman on the cover?

Kevin Burks

George Perez drew Superman, and even colored it for us. If you ever get curious about our covers, see the bottom of the mast head each issue for an About the Cover...

Replacing Doonesbury

Dear Bob:

. . . First off, my most heartfelt congratulations on reaching your first anniversary at COMICS SCENE. Glad to see that good ideas can really turn into something.

Regarding your article "Doonesbury Takes A Vacation" (COMICS SCENE #7), I have taken the liberty of enclosing several strips from the strip Bloom County by Berke Breathed, which I'm sure you'll agree has the potential to match, if not beat, Doonesbury. I know that mentions have been made of this strip in your mag before, but really think that the readers should be made aware of it again.

I'm sure if enough people start writing in, requesting their newspaper pick it up, then *Bloom County* will get the exposure it deserves. Further, once Trudeau gets his proverbial act together, there will be alot of people who will be like those of us in the Nation's Capitol, and be able to enjoy two upbeat, refreshing quality strips at the same time.

Looking forward to reading more about *Bloom County* in the near future, I remain.

I remain what?

Irving J. Crontzmeyer
Washington, D.C.

We're pursuing Breathed for a feature interview. Hopefully, he'll say yes soon.

Rating the Writers

To the Editor:

. . . Not that anyone's interested, but here's my personal gradigs of the comics scripters I like and have liked at one time over the past 15 years.

Stan Lee—No fun anymore.

Gerry Conway—A professional. Good with characterization, especially villains. Fair dialogue, too much narration. Drama a little too "cute."

Steve Englehart—Thoughtful and pleasureable.

Steve Gerber—A boodthirsty hypocrite. Also a "cute" dramatist.

Jack Kirby—Once a skilled writer/artist, now he overdoes both.

Donald F. McGregor—A heavy writer, thoughful and provocative.

Roy Thomas—A real pro; lively, interesting, informative. Can be a real pleasure to read.

Len Wein—Much like Conway

Marv Wolfman—Almost as bad as Gerber, only "cuter."

Will Day
Bangor, ME 04401

Any comments?

Another APA

Dear People,

. . . I read where you're doing an article on apas. Well, for those interested in superhero teams, I'd like to tell them about S-TAPA which is dedicated to just that very thing. For information, send a SASE to:

S-TAPA
c/o J.P. McClernan,
3789 Barger Street,
Shrub-Oak, NY 10588

Thanks a lot, and best of luck in your next year.

Gina L. Dartt
R.R. #2 Brookfield,
Colchester County
Nova Scotia, Canada
BON 1C0

BLOOM COUNTY BERKE BREATHED

Comics Reporter

DC COMICS

Frank Miller's Ronin Debuts in April

Ronin, perhaps the most talked about new series in years, will debut in April. In an unusual move, DC Comics will release the series every six weeks, meaning the six-issue mini-series will conclude this fall.

Frank Miller is pencilling, inking, scripting and editing the mini-series with lettering by John Costanza and coloring by Lynne Varley. The $2.50 package will contain 48 pages with no ads. The first two issues will boast wraparound covers.

Little is being said about the series prior to its release, but Miller has described it as a "science fiction, sword and sorcery, samurai, superhero urban nightmare adventure." The tale does involve strong influences from Japanese culture, something which has been developing in Miller's work during the last few years. It takes place some years from now in a universe totally unrelated to the standard DC culture. The tale is self-contained and will be completed in six issues.

Miller has devoted himself to the project since leaving Daredevil. Additionally, he has pencilled a handful of DC covers and may do other work after the project's completion.

IN OTHER NEWS: DC has announced several artist switches on various titles. Chuck Patton replaces Don Heck with *Justice League of America* #217 while Heck takes over Gene Colan's slot on *Wonder Woman* as of #206. Colan will then move over to *Detective Comics* with #528. This solidifies the creative teams on these three books and represents Patton's first regular assignment. Mike Hernandez and Rick Bryant will take over the Huntress in the near-future. Gene Day's brother, Dan, has been signed by DC to illustrate a new project currently under development.

A scheduling problem has forced the creation of a longer frequency for Camelot 3000. The maxi-series will now conclude in September with the book being released every five or six weeks. The direct-only title has been well-received in comics shops and DC says they want to ensure its creative quality by implementing this new schedule. Bruce Patterson has dropped the inking assignment as of issue #6 to devote his time to First Comics. Terry Austin will ink issues 7-12.

PHOTO: DEBORAH UPTON

Frank Miller

Two scenes from Frank Miller's Ronin, premiering in April. Little information is being released about the series but we do know it's mixing genres and influences.

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WARREN PUBLISHING

Two Month Suspension, Then Maybe Reprints

In early January, eight members of the Warren Publishing editorial staff were loyed off and a two-month suspension was enforced on the line of five magazines. Current plans call for the books to return as all-reprint titles for a minimum of six months allowing the publishers time to determine the company's ultimate fate.

At presstime, certain doubts were raised as to whether or not the reprints will ever be published.

The news came at an awkward time since work was being completed on the 25th Anniversary issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the magazine which made a name for Jim Warren, president and publisher of the company. The unfinished mechanicals for the issue remain in the office, awaiting a decision on their fate.

The 25-year-old company has been a victim of declining sales for several years. Only a few months ago, they stopped accepting free-lance submissions. The offices still hold a tremendous backlog of unpublished manuscripts and finished stories, some of which date back a decade.

Pacific Comics is now negotiating to purchase a hefty percentage of the inventory.

Few members of the editorial staff are needed at the office. Tim Moriarty, named editor of the black-and-white comics only a year ago, was spending two days a week at the office in January.

Although declining sales was a major factor in the suspension, former editors and freelancers indicate the problem may be more deeply rooted in the company's corporate structure. Warren claims to be making a profit on the magazines, yet a greater profit is realized through the firm's mail-order arm, Captain Company. Also, huge amounts of corporate funds were spent on legal fees. Harlan Ellison, among others, have launched copyright infringement suits against the company.

Warren himself, say some freelancers, has not been seen in the offices for several years and decisions were either being made on a tentative basis or put off until the publisher appeared. Such delays left *FM* without an editor after Forrest J. Ackerman's resignation last summer (see FANGORIA #24, 25).

In December 1981, the entire line was signed up with Warner Publisher Services in the hopes of greater distribution. Part of the contract mandated a minimum of six titles be published by Warren, so when *The Rook* hit a malaise of poor sales, *The Goblin* was created and rushed to fill the schedule. That title lasted only three issues; the fourth, finished and ready for the printer, was cancelled.

Also, last spring, color sections—eight-page comic-sized stories—were added to the magazines. But, after a few months, they too were cancelled, as were *FM*'s color pages.

FM was perhaps the most troubled title of the Warren line since it had fallen behind the competition and appeared "antiquated" to some readers. Moriarty, associate editor Randy Palmer and art director William Mohalley were trying to bring the venerable magazine up-and-to-date with new editorial approaches and ideas, moves cut short by the suspension. "We really had some nice things in the anniversary issue," Moriarty said. "I hope we get to print it."

The last issues published before the suspension are: *Creepy* #145, *Eerie* #139, *Vampirella* #112, *1994* #29 and *FM* #191—one issue way from the anniversary.

The last five magazines from Warren.

MARVEL COMICS

Klaus Janson Leaves Daredevil

On January 19, Klaus Janson officially resigned from pencilling and inking Daredevil, a series he has been involved with for more than six years. Janson cited the tremendous deadline pressures of producing the monthly comic as the sole reason for his departure.

"There's not enough time to do justice to the book and the kind of work I want to do," Janson told COMICS SCENE the day after his resignation. "I'll miss him terribly and I still have one issue left to do." Issue #196 will be his final job on the title which features his finishes over thumbnail breakdowns by Larry Hama.

Janson has been the inker, embellisher and/or penciller on the series throughout the last few years working with artists as varied as Gil Kane and Frank Miller. When Miller left the series last year, Janson continued to do the art and color the stories. In November, he was finally forced to relinquish the coloring to Glynis Wein in a bid to meet the deadlines but "it wasn't enough."

For now, he will pencil, ink and color next summer's Star Wars annual which will be written by Mary Jo Duffy. Janson was also given a tentative approval to ink one issue of John Buscema's Kull mini-series to be published later this spring. After that, he is weighing offers from various companies and taking some time to put his life in order.

IN OTHER NEWS: Bob Budiansky, a penciller and former assistant editor, has been named Marvel's eighth editor with freelance letterer Mike Higgins being added as his assistant. The team has no regular series on their schedule but are charged with numerous graphic novels, mini-series and one-shots. In short, here's a run down:

X-Men/Micronauts: Marvel's top two teams will meet for a six-issue series, co-scripted by Bill Mantlo and Chris Claremont with Butch Guice tentatively set to pencil.

Superboxers: A graphic novel from Ron Wilson who will plot and pencil this futuristic tale of a world run by corporations. To them, boxers are like Roman gladiators: owning them is a sign of power. The corporate boxing champ will meet with the underground's champ in an epic battle, dialogued by John Byrne and inked by Armando Gil.

Thor: A graphic novel written by Jim Shooter and drawn by Bill Sienkiewicz.

Black Panther: A four-issue mini-series plotted and pencilled by Denys Cowan and scripted by Shooter.

Dazzler & the Beast: Written by Ann Nocenti, this four-issue mini-series will be pencilled by Don Perlin.

Jack of Hearts: Bill Mantlo's creation finally gets a mini-series with pencils from Rick Leonardi.

The Hulk: A graphic novel from Shooter, Bret Blevins and Vince Colletta.

Kree-Skrull War: The epic *Avengers* tale by Roy Thomas, Neal Adams, John Buscema and Tom Palmer will be reprinted in two monthly 64 page Baxter books for $2.50. Alan Zelenetz will write a seven-page introduction to set up the events that led to the war which appeared in issues #93-97.

Moon Knight: The black and white tales by Doug Moench and Bill Sienkiewicz will be collected in three 48 page/monthly Baxter books for $2.

In other areas, Bruce Jones has left writing *Ka-Zar* to concentrate on his three Pacific titles. A replacement has been chosen but not yet announced. Allen Milgrom has also given up his editorial post to return to freelancing. His replacement has also been selected, but no announcement was made at presstime. Milgrom, who has been instrumental in developing the Epic line of comics, *Marvel Fanfare* and other formats, will continue to write US 1 and pencil the *Avengers* and take on extra assignments.

Bob McLeod is unable to meet deadlines as both penciller and inker on the *New Mutants* so Sal and John Buscema will each pencil several issues and McLeod will ink them to maintain the title's look.

Shooter will script a special *Dazzler* graphic novel heralding changes in her series and in her powers. *Dazzler the Movie* will find Alison Blaire in Hollywood and her mutant secret will be revealed to the world. The story's themes will closely tie-in with those brought up in the recent *X-Men Graphic Novel*. Frank Springer is slated to pencil the story, due out in June.

ANIMATION

Gearing up for the 1983-84 Saturday AM Season

The current Saturday morning battle for ratings supremacy started out as a running battle between NBC's *The Smurfs* and ABC's *Pac Man/Little Rascals/Richie Rich* show. At first, the gobbler headed out with a strong lead but by early November though, the little blue men regained the lead and smurfed ahead. On the other hand, the big surprise hit of the season has been NBC's *Gary Coleman Show*, which sometimes beats both *Smurfs* and *Pac Man* in the ratings.

All three are sure to be renewed this season, along with *The Incredible Hulk/Spider-Man & His Amazing Friends*, which is holding its own in the ratings as well. CBS is sitting this season out, with a schedule that has sunk like the proverbial rock. Frequent schedule shuffling has changed little and even the all-mighty *Bugs Bunny* has fallen on hard times (one week his show had only a 10 share). Their only hope lies with *The Dukes*, based on, what else?, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, premiering in February.

That show may as well be titled, *Around the World in 13 weeks with the Duke Boys & Boss Hogg*.

On the adventure front, by the time you read this, work will be ready on Filmation's *Young Tarzan* and *Doc Savage* (holdovers from previous years), H-B is once again trying with *The New Teen Titans* and Marvel is readying plans for several of their heroes. Based on *The Hulk's* success, they have *She-Hulk*, *Teen Hulk* (to change he says . . . are you ready? . . . "Help Mommy!") *Hulk Hound* and *The Hulk-Spider* (a spider hit with gamma rays). Last year's reject, *Captain America & The Barbarians*, will be tried again, along with *Daredevil*, *US 1*, *Silver Surfer* and *The Aliens*, a combination of the *X-Men* and *E.T.*. Comedies from Marvel include spin-offs of *The Co-ed Blues Brothers*, *Two Wild & Crazy Guys* and an animated version of the arcade hit, *Frogger*.

Ruby-Spears is also trying the video front with a series based on *Donkey Kong*, the hottest game since *Pac Man*. R-S is also trying to pitch series based on *the Atom*, *Hawkman* and *Wonder Woman*. They may also attempt a revival of *Alvin and the Chipmunks* for NBC.

Comic strip characters continue to be optioned by studios and networks alike but no one knows if we'll ever see *The Phantom*, *Hagar the Horrible*, or *Prince Valiant*. Live-action people headed for the small screen include, gasp, Brooke Shields.

Filmation is developing 65 half-hour episodes of *Masters of the Universe*, based on the toys from Mattel. Much of the basics established in the DC Comics mini-series will be used on the show, headed for syndication not network. He-Man, Teegra and Skeletor will be battling away on a mystical world in a far-flung dimension.

—Darrell McNeil

(Our correspondent is currently doing storyboards on Masters of the Universe and is a long-time animation and comics fan.)

Richie Rich has found new fame and fortune on the Saturday morning front, aided by Pac Man.

RED CIRCLE

Three New Titles Planned

Rich Buckler, editor of the Red Circle line, announced plans for several new books to see print in 1983. The first will be a Baxter book reprinting the classic Joe Simon-Jack Kirby *Fly* stories from the late 1950s. Jim Steranko, who drew the premiere *Fly* cover, will create a wraparound cover for the book.

Martin Griem's *Thunder Bunny* has been picked up by Red Circle and will become a bi-monthly series premiering later this year. The feature last saw print a year ago in *Charlton Bullseye*. Griem will script with Brian Buniak and Frank Giacoia as artists. Griem retains the copyright to his creation.

The other title announced is Buckler's *Galaxia*. Though he published the first issue on his own, Red Circle takes over the series with #2, making it the third new talent showcase announced in the last few months; DC and Pacific both have titles under development.

Buckler also referred to numerous "super" projects including at least one graphic novel he will illustrate and a Baxter mini-series. As for film adaptations, Buckler is hoping to sign a deal with Red Circle to adapt his film, *Lilith*, when the project is close to release. At present, it is one-quarter finished and awaiting further financing.

The Mr. Justice story penciled by Trevor Von Eeden was inked by Giacoia and included in *Fly* #1 as a back-up. Buckler says other old characters will be tested in a similar manner in the future.

FIRST COMICS

George Freeman to illustrate Warp Special #2

George Freeman has suddenly become a man much in demand these days. In addition to his occasional work at DC and Marvel, Freeman has been busily inking Billy Graham's pencils on Eclipse's *Sobre* and contributing inks to Howard Chaykin's art for *Warp Special #1*, now on sale. His work so impressed First Comics that he was quickly signed to pencil and ink their second *Warp Special*, due out this summer.

Peter Gillis will script, once again delving into the background of the Warp universe and furnishing further details about the major characters. The first special, for ex-

Warp .5 begins a mini-series featuring Sargon, written by John Ostrander and illustrated by Lenin Delsol.

ART: 1983 FIRST COMICS INC.

ample, was devoted to Prince Chaos. Issue #1 also introduces a plot device which enables the various First Comics characters to meet one another although the first crossover tale won't officially happen for some time, according to editor Mike Gold.

"We're going to treat crossovers as big things," he said in January. "I remember when there was the first Green Lantern-Flash crossover in the early '60s. It blew me and my friends away, and I want to do the same here."

In the regular *Warp* comic, Rick Burchett has been signed to ink Lenin Delsol's pencils on the three-issue Sargon back-up stories beginning in #5. Burchett will be assigned a regular inking slot in the near future, Gold added.

Gold announced that a series of one-page features will begin appearing in various First books to help educate readers as to how the direct market originated. The first installment will concentrate on Wally Wood and the contribution he made through *Witzend*, one of the most respected fanzines in the business. Other columns, all written by longtime fan Charlie Meyerson, will help explain who published what when and how it all paved the way for today's direct-market boom. Another installment will concern itself with Mike Friedrich's "ground level" work with *Star's Reach* and *Quack!*

American Flagg, the series written and illustrated by Howard Chaykin, has been scheduled to premiere in June. Plans for First's sixth title will be announced soon.

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CS-6

SPECIAL PROJECT

Jack Kirby's 3-D Comic

It's been just slightly over 30 years since Arch Oboler's 3-D film *Bwana Devil* spawned a few dozen 3-D films in the early eras as well as millions of copies of 3-D comic books, the most successful being Joe Kubert and Norman Maurer's *Mighty Mouse* series. And now in the 3-D wake churned up by *Comin At Ya!*, a new 3-D comic book is born. With art by the famed Jack Kirby and story by Ray Zone, this 20-page deluxe publication is being produced by 3-D Comic Publications, a subsidiary of 3-D Video—a company which has had millions of people staying home from the movies to watch 3-D TV in the form of anaglyphic verisons of *Gorilla at Large*, *Revenge of the Creature* and *Bwana Devil*.

Entitled "Battle for a Three Dimensional World," the comic is a factual survey of the history of 3-D technology and its evolution told in the form of a superhero conflict. Illustrated by Jack Kirby, the well-known creator of *Captain America*, *The Fantastic Four* and *The Incredible Hulk*, this comic has greater depth and more dynamic illustrations than any 3-D comic book ever published. Each page contains more than seven levels of depth.

The action centers on Videora, a beautiful cosmic telepath, who narrates the story of Stereon, master of time and space. Together, Stereon and Videora fight Circe, the evil demon from beyond the black hole, who is able to transform herself into Cyclops, a one-eyed giant. Circe is obsessed with stopping the progress of 3-D technology on planet Earth.

Videora's story includes an historical account of the evolution of 3-D technology. She starts with Leonardo da Vinci, who discovered many principles of three-dimensional vision and takes us up to the first color, three-dimensional TV broadcast in 1982.

Each comic is individually wrapped and includes a pair of custom-designed 3-D glasses. No cheap pulp paper here, the Kirby art is printed on high-quality heavy coated book stock with four-color Kirby cover art.

The Kirby art was painstakingly converted to 3-D over a period of many months by Hugh Alderson, Steve Aubrey and Tim Cardinale.

The people at 3-D Comic are, as you might imagine, committed to 3-D and they promise that this is only the beginning. In the future, they hope to produce 3-D comics in full color. A sample of their progress toward this goal appears on the comic's back cover. The comic book and special poster are available at your local comics shop or through STARLOG.

The cover to Battle for a Three-Dimensional World by Jack Kirby.

INDEPENDENT PRESS

New Titles, T-Shirts and Trade Paperbacks Coming

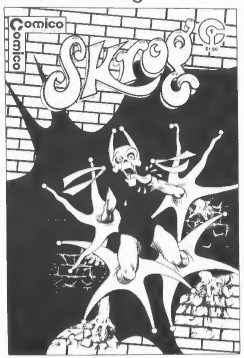
ECLIPSE ENTERPRISES

Dean Mullaney announced plans for *Eclipse Monthly* to replace *Eclipse Magazine* in May. The magazine will cease publication with #8 and then, the color monthly will debut. Mullaney plans for 48-page issues on Baxter paper for $2 with the stories mainly in the superhero mode. Contents appearing on a regular basis will include *The Masked Man* by B.C. Boyer, *Static* by Steve Ditko, *Cap'n Quick and the Foozle* by Marshall Rogers and the offbeat *Ragamuffins* by Don McGregor and Gene Colan. Trina Robbins' adaptation of Sax Rohmer's *Dope* will conclude in issues one and two of the new title.

Doug Moench has found a name for his monthly title, which will premiere this summer: *Aztec Ace*. Ace is a time traveller who returns to ancient eras to prevent others from manipulating history to serve future needs. Cat Yronwode will edit the series.

Al Gordon, former *Spider-Woman* inker, will become the inker on *DNAgents*, premiering this spring. The writer is Mark Evanier and the artist, Will Meunigot.

Steve Ditko's latest creation: Static, soon to appear in Eclipse Monthly.



DONNING COMPANY

Following the strong sales on the two color volumes of *Elfquest*, Kay Reynolds says plans are underway for two other trade paperbacks due out in the fall. The first is a collection of Phil Foglio's *Bucky Godot*. Foglio, a two-time Hugo

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ABRAXAS KP

Award winner, has been weaving the tales of Godot, a happy go-lucky rabbit, in various publications throughout the last few years. Foglio will color the stories and contribute one long new yarn to round out the book.

The second book features *Lightrunner*, the character written by Lamar Waldron and drawn by Rod Wiggan. The strip has been serialized in *Visions*, the publication of the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. Wiggam's art has improved dramatically since he began the strip so he will redraw the first half of the epic space opera. The 160-170 page volume will also be in full-color.

JOHN C. PRODUCTIONS

Hall of Fame #1, featuring *THUNDER Agents* reprints by Wally Wood and Reed Crandall, was finally published in February. Issue two is slated for later this spring to conclude the stories and properly introduce fans to the various Agents: Dynamo, NoMan, and Lightning. This summer, Carbonaro plans to release *THUNDER Agents* #1. The 32-page, mando comic will be in full color. The opening tale was scripted by Chris Adams and drawn by the team of Lou Manna and Willie Blyberg.

Adams is also compiling *Basically Strange* #2 and reports that the contents will include tales by Frank Thorne, Alex Toth, Gary Morrow, Pepe Moreno and a new artist, Bebe Casares, whose work has already appeared in *Epic Illustrated*.

The THUNDER Agents will also guest star in *Justice Machine Annual* #1, delayed from last fall by Nobel Comics.

Rick Bryant, who was featured in *BS* #1, reports that a shuttle painting he did has been turned into a poster and is now being sold at the Alabama Space Center Gift Shop to accompany its currently-running program on space.

A second portfolio of Bryant's work is also available from Juan Collado. The five black and white plates feature his fantasy women.

FANTAGRAPHICS

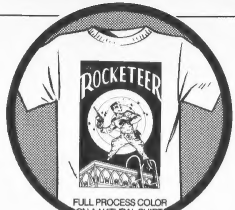
Hugo #1 has sold out according to publisher Gary Groth. Plans are tentatively set for a second issue to appear later this year. Meanwhile, work on *Dalgoda*, which we mentioned last issue, has been delayed, allowing artist Dennis Fujitake a chance to get ahead of the deadlines. Issue one is now set for June.

Love and Rockets #2 should be out in April. Jaime Hernandez has contributed a 40-page story while his brother, Gilbert, has turned in some shorter works. Groth has nothing, but praise for their work and hopes that *Love and Rockets* finds an audience.

Nemo #1 will see print in March with 64 pages for $2.95.

GRAPHITTI DESIGNS

This new young company started selling t-shirts featuring comics characters last summer and plan a full line of heroic clothing for 1983. According to Bob Chapman, the $7.95 shirts are 100% cotton in small, medium, large and extra large sizes. The first four shirts are Steve Canyon, The Spirit, *Ms. Tree* and the Rocketeer, all by their original artists, featuring the characters in classic poses.



Just one of the t-shirt designs available from Graphitti Designs.

The t-shirts can be purchased by mail from the firm by adding $1 postage for each shirt: 515 W. Valencia Dr. Unit E, Fullerton, CA 92632.

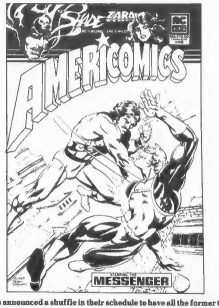
FICTIONEER BOOKS

David Anthony Kraft says that the first issue of *Comics Interview* has sold out. The book has been well-received by fans and dealers alike so plans are being made for a long run. The second issue, due in March, features Frank Miller's *Ronin*. The in-depth Miller interview will talk about life after *Daredevil*. Also set for the issue are chats with Mark Evanier, scripter of *Blackhawk* and the *DNAgents*, discussing his days with Jack Kirby; Scott Shaw! on *Captain Carrot* and Bob Larkin on his cover paintings for *Doc Savage*.

COMICO

Primer #3, out in March, will feature more work from unknown talents plus a story pencilled by Mike Hernandez who is quickly becoming an artist in demand. In preparation are first issues of *Slaughterman*, *Az*, *Skrog* and *Grendel*, characters introduced in the first two issues of *Primer*. The black-and-white direct-sales comics will feature 30 pages of art for $1.50.

(Continued on page 24)



AC Comics announced a shuffle in their schedule to have all the former Charlton Bulls-eye material published in 1983. Part of the shuffle resulted in the creation of Americomics Special -1, featuring The Sentinels of Liberty—four former Charlton heroes, Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, Nightshade and The Question. Americomics -1 finally premiered in February with issue 2 set to follow in March.

Vortex -2, due out in March, features "Delirium" by David Ross, a cover from Paul Rivoche, and back-up tales by Nick Pellwka and Tom Nesbit. WP Marks promises the bi-monthly magazine from Canada will continue to present Canadian talents to American audiences. Plans call for issue four to be an all-Gene Day special. The 32 page black and white comic-sized magazine retails for $1.95.

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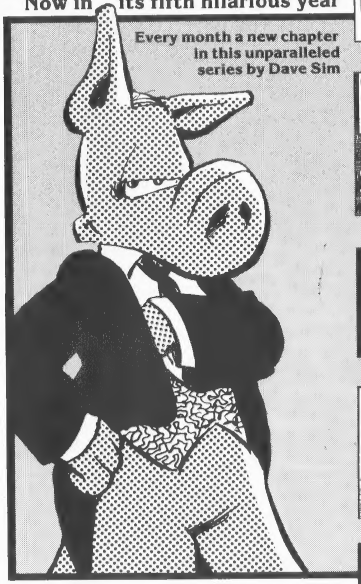

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By BRUCE SWEENEY

One of my truly prized logos is this one from Britain's Bryan Talbot. His *Adventures of Luther Arkwright* Vol. #1 is out and while it has yet to be distributed by an American outfit, I am certain that it is strictly a matter of time. Simultaneously, the *Brainstorm Trilogy* is another album featuring his Chester P. Hackenbush character with an introduction by me. Last Gasp will be distributing that title shortly.

LAST GASP

Speaking of whom, *Commies from Mars* #4 gets my vote as best u.g. of '82. It included a story by Peter Kuper who did my logo in issue #7. Last Gasp has several new titles out including *White Whore* #4, edited by Larry Fuller for $2. Robert Armstrong's *Mickey Rat* #4 is out as well as *San Francisco* #7 with a Spain cover. Robert Crumb has *Weirdo* #7 due and we should also be seeing *Junkwoffel* #5 with Vaughn and Mark Bode material.

KITCHEN SINK

It has been too often said that undergrounds have lost their punch and that our own Howard Cruse is "too cutesy" a cartoonist to be *really* underground. While both statements are occasionally true, feast your eyes on *Gay Comix* #3 and *Bizarre Sex* #10 to dispel those silly notions.

Kitchen Sink has yet again delivered two provocative and creative adult comix. The covers to these are extremely racy and daring with the contents extremely well done. *B.S.* #10 includes the sequel to *B.S.* #6, which was busted in England. Speaking of which . . .

A Blatant Review

I have tried to stay out of the reviewing capacity with this column and concentrate on reporting. I have not been supportive of several escapades passing as projects, but neither have I often been negative when the results should have been returned to the drawing board, if not a nearby waste basket. For once, I will clearly, unequivocally recommend *Knockabout* #4 from England. It's a must.

Those American u.g. fans who overlook British product often do themselves an injustice. Not only is *Knockabout* #4 lavishly peppered with outstanding contributions by Crumb, Wilson, Gebbie and Griffith but the English material is also superb. Emerson, Harper and Mathews are excellent. Everything does not work; some of it seems muddy and befuddled, but that only brings it down to the level of excellence.

All proceeds from sales of this book will be donated to *Knockabout*'s legal defense fund, which is trying to recuperate from having *Bizarre Sex* busted after being shipped in from the States. Both Kitchen and Last Gasp are distributing this enticing and deserving underground.

A real must for collectors is *Practical Comix* #1, 75¢ pp for this digest-sized eight-pager from Gary Whitney, 901 Washington #2W, Evanston, Il. 60202. The material was written by two members and one writer of NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Gary writes that "these guys come from Evanston's Practical Theatre Co., and were 'discovered' by *SNL*'s producers two weeks before the start of the season." It's also no secret that *SNL*'s Conehead vignettes were partly inspired by Zippy the Pinhead.

Dip Comics are more personal tales of human eccentricity from Ohio. The artwork is by Gary Dumm, Greg Budgett (of *American Splendor*), Brian Chalmers and Sean Carroll. The material is largely by Scott MacGregor, a Ohio X-ray technician who is threatening to quit his job this year to work on more *Dips* and an original comic strip.

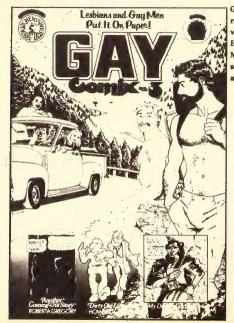
Tim Fuller of Brouhaha Studios says that *Hardboiled Animals* #2 should be out in April and will feature work by Fuller, Erling, Cosgriff, Krauss, our own Dave McDonnell, George Kochell and others. Same price but six additional pages. #1 won a design award from International Association of Business Communicators . . . Bud Plant says that *First Kingdom* #17 is out with a color cover by Steve Oliff.

Comix World (Box 7082, Berkeley, Ca. 94707) has several mini's currently available including such promising titles as *Subliminal Lobotomy*, *Pagan Comix*, *Babyfat* 28, and *Stonerman* #5 & 6. 50¢ plus postage.

Larry Rippee writes that he'll have a page, "Mr-Walk-Down-The-Street" appearing in *Eclipse*. Jim Bourgeois says that he's finishing up an alligator story for them . . . Constant Cause, P.O. Box 15243, Philadelphia, Pa. 19125 is a small mail order service for solely small publishers and self-published products. They carry items by Mike Roden, Howski Studios, and several others as well.

Paul Curtis, RD #2, Saegertown, Pa. 16433 is turning out micro-comics 3 for 25¢ and a stamp featuring comix by our buddy Brian Pearce, Matt Feazell, Bobby Sommerkamp and others. ($3.63 for series #1, 36 micro's.) . . . Ken Moran (216B Sherbrook, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 2B6 Canada) has *Canadian Biker Blues* and *Winnipeg Sun* for 50¢ plus a stamp. Free Xmas card on request. . . . . *Monday Funnies* #9 is $1.75 pp from Pastime Productions, P.O. Box 19818, Portland, Ore. . . . Adults Only. Robb tells us that *Snafu* #5 is due from Canada . . . Just another *8-page Wonder* #5 & #6 are out. 50¢ each & a stamp from Rodger's Books; P.O. Box 605, Blairstown, N.J. 07825.

Raw #5 should be out as you read this issue. Art Spiegelmen reports the 52-page issue will have 16 full-color pages for $4.95, plus $1 postage (27 Greene St., NY, NY 10013). Contents include color from EverMeuler, the fourth chapter of Maus, and strips by Jay Lynch, Marty, Carperteri, Charles Burns, Kim Deitch, Gary Panto, Kaz and many others.



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Pacific Comics

A look at one of the new-breed of comics publishers and what they offer readers

By JEFF GELB

The story of Pacific Comics is like a comic book fan's fairy tale: Ten years ago, Pacific Comics was a high school senior with a $50 collection of comics. Today, Pacific Comics is an organization that employs 25 people, works with about 50 professional freelancers, including Jack Kirby and Neal Adams, and publishers a full line of comic books, portfolios, and books. Along the way, Pacific Comics has become a force that has already caused ripples of significant change to spread throughout the comic book industry.

In 1972, Steve Schanes was a 17-year old high school senior in San Diego with a love for comic books and a few extra dollars in his pocket. He was at a swap meet and happened upon a collection of 900 comic books for sale for $50 (these were the good old days!), which he quickly paid. He took the collection home where he sold all the Marvel books to his 13-year old brother Bill for $30. And thus was born the nucleus of Pacific Comics. Bill and Steve began selling their books at the San Diego Comics Club (soon to become the San Diego Comic Convention), and, in early 1974, opened San Diego's first comic book store under the company title of Pacific Comics.

By 1978 there were four Pacific Comic shops throughout San Diego County, and the Schanes brothers had brought in fellow comics collector and fan David Scroggy to help run the operation. The three noticed two disturbing trends: first there was plenty of walk-in taffic in their stores, but no one distributor for the types of product those people wanted to buy. Second, the local comics distributor made comics a low priority item, which meant lateness problems, insubstantial discounts, and useless overstock. So Pacific called Marvel and became one of the first comic shops to get their books directly from the comics company. At this time, Pacific also began distributing Marvel's books to other Southern California comics shops, which was the start of a comics and related material distribution system now covering all 50 states and 20 countries. Distribution now contributes about 65 percent of Pacific Comics' income.

Pacific published its first professional artwork under the Schanes and Schanes logo, in 1977 in four portfolios of work by Howard Chaykin, Frank Thorne and Frank Cirocco. David Scroggy recalled, "We'd been distributing the portfolios and thought it was a field that would grow. They were marginal in sales for a long time, but we felt they had the potential of becoming accepted as a collectable." Some 30 portfolios later, with work published by such diverse talents as Wendy Pini, Alex Nino, Bil Stout, Chris Miller and Lela Dowling, Pacific has found its audience for portfolio art. Though portfolios account for only a single-digit percentage of the company's annual income, according to Bill Schanes, they can indeed be profitable as well as collectable. For example, Scroggy told this story: "For our latest *Elfquest* portfolio, there was much discussion about how many to do. We decided to press 3,000 and then got orders for about 8,000! So we're still trying to gauge the size of what is apparently a growing audience."

CAPTAIN VICTORY & SILVERSTAR © 1983 JACK KIRBY INC.; ROCKETEER © 1983 DAVE STEVENS, MISSING MAN © 1983 STEVE LAFFNEY; MS. MYSTIC © 1983 NEAL ADAMS, STARSLAYER © 1983 MIKE GRELL; GROO THE WANDERER © 1983 SERGIO ARAGONES.

A collection of titles Pacific has published in its first two years of existence. The Rocketeer has become their biggest fan favorite.

BUILDING THE BETTER COMIC BOOK

With professional comic artist contacts fostered through their portfolios, and having developed a strong network for distribution, it was only natural that the comics fans who ran Pacific decided in the late '70s to develop their own line of four-color comic books. The final impetus for getting started was the success of Marvel's *Dazzler* #1, a book that was marketed only through direct sales means at Steve Schanes's suggestion (at a 1980 San Diego Comic Convention meeting with Marvel), and which went on to sell a staggering 400,000 copies. David Scroggy commented, "This was the great awakening to everyone that the comics specialty shops had become a market of their own, fully capable of supporting a book's entire print run, often distributed through Pacific. We felt we were more in touch with the needs of these shops than anyone, including Marvel, and that we could probably do just as well or better at producing comics for that marketplace."

Of course, not every direct-sale comic book produced sells as dazzlingly as *Dazzler* #1. But, Bill Schanes pointed out, "It's more profitable to print 60,000 or 70,000 non-returnable comics for the comics shops than to print 125,000 and sell only 25 percent on the newsstands."

With those economic values in mind, Pacific contacted Jack Kirby, who soon presented Pacific with their first four-color comic book: *Captain Victory*, which sold 90,000 copies in the summer of 1981. Since then, the line has grown into nine titles, including *Victory*, *Starslayer* (soon to move to First Comics), *Twisted Tales*, *Alien Worlds*, *Groo the Wanderer*, *Pacific Presents*, *Elric*, and *Ms. Mystic* (the first copy of which sold a hefty 200,000 copies). Comics publishing now makes up 35 percent of Pacific's yearly income.

All of the Pacific triumvirate have editorial say over the comic book line, though their input varies depending on the book and its creator(s). Steve Schanes commented, "You don't really edit a Jack Kirby. You can give him an idea: do an origin story, create a superhero for us, but he's pretty well set in his ways so far as his book's direction is concerned. We do pass along all letters received from readers to each book's creator(s), which may help to determine editorial policy over a period of time."

David Scroggy recalled, "When Mike Grell presented us with his *Starslayer* concept, he had already plotted out all six issues in detail. So we had the chance to look at the entire package, discuss it in detail, and then give him the go-ahead to do the books based on those discussions. Similarly, there was a lot of give-and-take

Pacific Comic Number One

What was the first Pacific Comic book? If you said 1981's *Captain Victory*, you'd be wrong both in character and year. Actually, the first Pacific Comic is a 1977 title called (appropriately enough) *One*.

Beneath a cover by then-popular album cover artist Philip Carrin, One's lead feature was a photo-strip starring Pacific's Steve Schanes and a San Diego resident named Cliff Terry (now working for Embassy Pictures) in a quasi-underground looking superhero strip. The overall effect of the high-contrast photos is less than perfect, but it was an interesting experiment. Also on view in One number one are two shorter, traditionally-rendered superhero strips, one with inking by a young Brent Anderson. Interestingly, a full-page ad promises "One Unleashed" in the coming (never published) second issue, with an excellent graphic interpretation of a character by Alex Nino. And, on the inside back cover, and editorial says, in part, "Pacific Comics is the wave of the future. One is just the beginning . . ."

Is One destined to become the *Motion Picture Funnies of Pacific Comics*? Don't hold your breath—of the 10,000 copies printed, most still remain in Pacific's warehouse, unsold.

Suddenly, it's a whole new marketplace, a radically new ballgame. We're seeing a lot of new people attempting to enter the field because, for the first time, really, it can really be worth their while to draw comics for a living.

—Steve Schanes

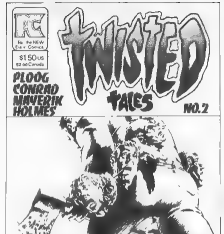
PHOTO: JACKIE ESTRADA

From left: Steve Schanes, David Scroggy and Bill Schanes pause for a moment in one of their spacious warehouses, filled with items they either publish and/or distribute.

with Steve Ditko in establishing *Missing Man* (published in *Pacific Presents*). Once established, he's had pretty much a free reign, though we have convinced him to work with a scripter.

"We're just now starting to do things like pair up scripters with artists, or artists with inkers," Scroggy said. "We're developing a lot of new talent right now from the submissions we're getting." Steve Schanes enthused, "Suddenly, it's a whole new marketplace, a radically new ballgame. We're seeing a lot of new people attempting to enter the field because, for the first time, really, it can really be worth their while to draw comics for a living. For instance, I've looked at samples from life drawing teachers and medical illustrators."

Schanes predicted, "Some of the new people we're looking at are staggering talents. They'll develop over the next three or four years and we'll see an incredible renaissance in comics. And, I have every indication that 'lost talents' will come back to comics. I refer to people who used to work in the field who will return now because of the better money. I also think we'll see people who now work under exclusive contracts for one company refusing to sign such contracts in the future so they can work for as many companies as they have the time."



Bruce Jones has brought new life to the anthology comic with two titles he is writing and editing. Twisted Tales will be horror stories in the EC-vein. . .

ART: © 1983 BERNI WRIGHTSON

MONEY TALKS

What's drawing so many people to Pacific, aside from the chance to submit samples to a new company, is their lucrative royalty plan. Simply explained, artist/creators get paid royalties in advance of publication, and then paid again according to how well the book sells. Pacific pays eight percent of cover price on the first 100,000 copies sold, and 10 percent on all copies sold above that. Put in more meaningful terms, that means that a book like *Ms. Mystic*, whose first issue sold 200,000 copies, paid Neal Adams around $800 per page, or over $16,000 for the book. If Adams worked quickly enough to put out 12 issues of *Ms. Mystic* a year, similar sales would insure him nearly $200,000 income just from that book alone!

This anti-competitive spirit on the part of Pacific is so genuine that Bill Schanes admitted he would consider running ads for other comic publishers' books in Pacific titles. "We feel the marketplace now is just a small percentage of what it's going to be, and we see no reason to want to limit the marketplace."

Advertising in Pacific Comics is a topic that has been considered very carefully. David Scroggy said, "You'd be surprised by how many reader surveys came back with the readers saying that what they liked most about our books was that we had no outside advertising."

Steve Schanes explained the ad posture Pacific will take which, he hoped, would be met as a reader-positive: "We'll keep 32 pages of art and other material and add a 'yellow pages' section in the middle of the books of useful comic-related ads. As the comics market goes more and more direct, readers will need to know where to get their books, so this sort of information will be valuable—it'll be a bonus."

Ads also keep the cost of their comics down; Bill Schanes predicted that, barring unforeseen increases in production costs, the dollar books will remain a dollar for quite some time. Other books will be priced competitively.

Pacific is already experimenting with various grades of paper and printing techniques. *Twisted Tales*, *Alien Worlds*, and *Elric* are all Baxter books, and *Elric* is also distinguished by its full-process color created by laser separations. Other books are using heavier-grade newsprint paper, Mando, that is whiter and retains more ink.

Last summer, Pacific released a collection of John Byrne's Rog-2000, with a new Byrne cover.

ART: © 1983 JOHN BYRNE

LOOK MA—NO SUPERHEROES!

Pacific's also experimenting with their books' contents. "We want to see what the market will bear," Steve Schanes commented, "so we're trying everything from funny animal to horror to SF." Science Fiction seems a surprising choice given its previous poor track record in four-color comics (discounting *Star Wars*). Bill Schanes responded, "It depends on who's doing it. If you have people like Al Williamson and Rich Corben drawing it, and Bruce Jones writing, how can you miss? And Bruce isn't writing down to anyone—he's writing stories that are, in the best definition of the term, adult: thought-provoking, as opposed to lots of sex and violence."

Curiously, there is no straight superhero book from Pacific. "It just happened to work out that way," Steve claimed. "We've published the best of what's been offered to us so far. We want to do superheroes, and we're looking at some concepts right now, but we have to be real choosy, since we can't afford too many losers. David and I look at as many as 50 stories submitted weekly, from both pros and amateurs. But we'll take our time, because when we come out with superhero books, they'll be very good, very well-thought-out."

Overall reader response to date has been most positive for the quasi-superhero *Rocketeer* by Dave Stevens. Everyone, from the readers to Pacific, wants to see Stevens turn out a regular *Rocketeer* book, but David Scroggy explained, "He puts so much blood, sweat and tears into this strip to be 100 percent his baby, and he just can't work fast enough to maintain any sort of regular publishing schedule. Even though he's paid well, it's barely profitable for him to do the strip, because of the hours he puts into it." Current plans call for reprinting the *Rocketeer* stories in a quality package that will also include a new story and/or other Stevens art.

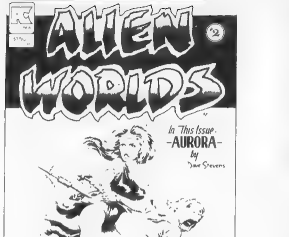
THINGS TO COME

That's not all Pacific has up its sleeve. Steve Schanes said he hoped to be publishing 12 regularly-scheduled comic books by next summer and David Scroggy points to a schedule with eight titles for June alone. Along the way, we'll see everything from one-shots to a showcase title for new talents.

Among those new titles are several new projects from the likes of Bill DuBay, Rudy Nebres, John Severin, and Frank Thorne. Gray Morrow is producing a three issue monthly mini-series, starting in May, called *Edge of Chaos*. It's a fantasy story, according to Scroggy, about a modern-day man being transported back to pre-cataclysm Atlantis. *Nexus* scripter Mike Barron and Rick Burchett—known for his Mike Mauser stories—are contributing two 10-page stories featuring a 19 year-old telepath named Quark.

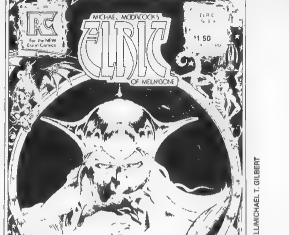
Pacific is also commissioning Jack Kirby to create three new superheroes, including designs and concepts, which they will license and assign them to other writers and artists. This will mean a total of five Kirby-created characters in the Pacific line-up.

And that's just from the comics division. Pacific Comics is a division of Blue Dolphin Enterprises, which also publishes books. Its first release was the U.S. publication of a Dutch book called *Paperbacks U.S.A. The Art of Al Williamson*, edited by James Van Hise saw print in January. Aside from the obligatory lengthy interview with the influential artist, the book has also included shorter talks with many of his contemporaries, including Frank Frazetta, Bill Gaines, Angelo Torres, Roy Krenkel, George Evans, Al Williamson, and others. Of course, the major selling point is the art itself: page after page of rare and unpublished works (including the same page that got Williamson his job at EC), along with several complete comic book and strip stories that are Williamson classics.



. . . While Alien Worlds brings us imaginative science fiction.

ART: © 1983 DAVE STEVENS



The sword and sorcery hero will finally receive his own bimonthly comic this spring.

ART: © 1983 P. CRAIG RUSSELL/MICHAEL T. GILBERT

Coming this summer from Blue Dolphin is Scott Shaw!'s *Oddball Comics*. Taken in part from Shaw!'s popular comic convention slide show, the book will present hundreds of illustrated examples of comic books' most quirky titles, stories, artists, and topics.

Ten years after the humble beginnings of Pacific Comics, the company seems to have just skimmed the surface of an iceberg of future activity. It's an exciting thought for both readers and the Pacific triumvirate as well. Bill Schanes commented, "The personal gratification comes from knowing that what we're doing is making people happy. And, of course, making us happy as well—we're doing much better now than a few years ago. Of course, it helps when you're doing things you like to do, and that's where we're at. Sometimes this doesn't even seem like work."

Davis Scroggy offered, "The reality of the jobs we do is probably quite different from people's fantasies. There's a lot of work, a lot of headaches. Creative people, after all, are usually temperamental people. But it's tremendously exciting to play a role in the birth of creative talents. And, since we all like comics ourselves, it's great to see the competition of all these companies producing better packages and better work. It's very gratifying to be a part of that process."

Steve Schanes had the final say: "It's stressful and exhilarating at the same time. We're working for ourselves and with a very competent crew. We work with pros who are the cream of the crop—and that's a great neighborhood to live in." ■

Kurtz Takes on The Spirit and Li'l Nemo

Producer Gary Kurtz, whose credits include the now legendary *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Dark Crystal*, has taken on two long range projects: animated film versions of Winsor McKay's visionary classic *Little Nemo* and that underground favorite *The Spirit* by Will Eisner.

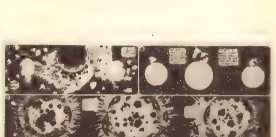
Kurtz terms both of these projects as long term because of the length of time that will be necessary to develop these properties into animated films. For *The Spirit*, Kurtz is particularly anxious to capture the mood and flavor of 1940s New York that Eisner projected so graphically in his panels. But translating the characters to film presents special problems, too.

"In an animated film, the development of the key art is very critical," begins Kurtz. "An animator may develop a model sheet for a character that looks magnificent, but none of the other animators will be able to draw it or it might just be that the character has too much hair — that can cause tremendous problems. We'll find ourselves going through eight, nine and 10 model sheets trying to capture the essence of the character yet simplify some of the edges because there will be a dozen different people that will have to work with it.

Kurtz emphasizes the importance of retaining the look of Will Eisner's style, the flavor of the characters and the mood and environment of the story. The script is being developed by Brad Bird, who is also directing.

"With Nemo, of course, we are working in total fantasy," smiles Kurtz. "It's the kind of story that you can have fun with a world of metamorphosizing furniture, weird plants growing, odd colors — a very turn of century Art Nouveau style." Ray Bradbury is developing the Nemo script currently.

Kurtz revealed that computer systems were being developed and tested to assist in the production of the animated films. The computer has the potential to open up entirely new vistas for animators allowing them to things that previously they were not even permitted to dream about. "For instance," begins Kurtz. "Computers allow you to achieve moving camera shots in animation. A computer can allow you to move the camera just as you would in a live action film. Complicated camera moves are very rarely done in animated films because of the difficult problems in shifting perspective that the animator has to deal with. A computer can solve all of those problems for the artist. Also computers can be used to generate textured backgrounds—brick buildings or streets that go off into infinity."



A sample of Winsor McCay's Little Nemo, now being turned into an animated film.

Kurtz does anticipate the computer doing any character animation at this time, but the savings in drudgery for the artist by lifting many of the tedious mechanical problems from his art will allow him to focus more energy with the creative end of animation.

COMICS SCENE

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#4: Marvel's creators talk about *Conan; Conan* photo preview; Richard and Wendy Pini with publishing tips; Is *Legion* fandom dead?; learn to letter comics; *Prince Valiant; Barney Google;* Gene Colan interview.
#5: Burne Hogarth's amazing career; *Batman's* Jim Aparo; Inker's Forum part One; Moebius new movie; turning movies into comics; Gene Colan part two; *Herbie*; Denis Kitchen redefines the Undergrounds.
#6: Camelot 3000 preview full-color poster; *Crusader Rabbit*; Inker's Part two; Martin Pasko responds to John Bryne; *Captain Easy*; Saturday TV; Max Collins on *Dick Tracy* & *Ms. Tree*; Howard Cruse on the Air Pirates.
#7: George Perez & the *Teen Titans; Elfquest* book preview; *Crusader Rabbit* episode guide; Inker's Panel concludes; Dean Mullaney on Alternative comics; Direct Sales explained at last and Sally Cruikshank's *Quasi at the Quackedero*.
#8: *Spider-Man* & his creators; *Cerebus*; Dave & Deni Sim; Trina Robbins interview; *Family Circus*; animator Glen Keane; APAs explained; France's *Valerian*; Howard Cruse on parody & the law; Marv Wolfman talks to his colleagues.
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Frank Frazetta

Fire and Ice may be the brainchild of Ralph Bakshi but the look and feel of the film is based on one of the best graphic designers in the field of illustration.

By JAMES VAN HISE

Fans think of wild beasts, sensuous women and mean-looking barbarians when they think of Frank Frazetta's work. His comic art and paintings have reached critical acclaim but now the time has come to move on to making his artwork live through animation. When *Fire and Ice* opens around Easter, people will see Frazetta characters live and breathe. This project represents the culmination of a goal because his earliest artistic influences were not only the great comics craftsmen such as Hal Foster, but the wonder of motion pictures.

"*King Kong*, of course, was one of the great influences in my life and in many artists' lives," Frazetta explains. "And then the old monster movies, like the early *Frankenstein* films, had that magic and mood."

Frazetta credits these early films as also being among the influences on his foray into animation. "It has an old-fashioned flavor and a lot of pizazz," he says. "It's like my work! It's rugged and primitive and hopefully, very exciting."

What makes *Fire and Ice* even more unique is that the style of animation and everything about the look of the film is designed to capture the essence of Frank Frazetta's art. One could say that Frazetta's road to Hollywood began the first time he put pen to paper.

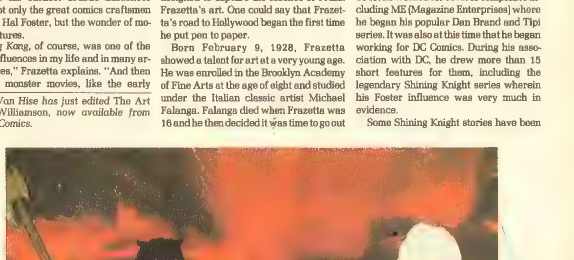
Born February 9, 1928, Frazetta showed a talent for art at a very young age. He was enrolled in the Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts at the age of eight and studied under the Italian classic artist Michael Falanga. Falanga died when Frazetta was 16 and he then decided it was time to go out into the world of commercial art.

His first professional work, still at 16, was as an assistant to John Giunta, a comic book artist who was prolific in the '40s and '50s. While working with Giunta, Frazetta drew a character of his own creation, Snowman, which appeared in the now classic 1944 *Tally-Ho Comics #1*.

In the late '40s, he drew funny animal stories and illustrations which he signed *Fritz* as well as with his own name, and in 1949, he worked for several companies including ME (Magazine Enterprises) where he began his popular Dan Brand and Tipi series. It was also at this time that he began working for DC Comics. During his association with DC, he drew more than 15 short features for them, including the legendary Shining Knight series wherein his Foster influence was very much in evidence.

Some Shining Knight stories have been

James Van Hise has just edited The Art of Al Williamson, *now available from Pacific Comics.*



A dramatic confrontation between the mysterious Lonewolf and one of Nekkura's warriors.

reprinted in the first two issues of the Seagate-DC title, *The Masterworks Series of Great Comic-Book Artists*. The comic is a direct-only, 32-page Baxter book retailing for $1.50. The first issue was recently released and the second is due in late spring.

Also during the '50s, Frazetta did a handful of stories for EC Comics, often teaming up with fellow artist Al Williamson. These science-fiction tales usually involved beasts and women, two of their trademarks.

Frazetta's famous *Thun'da #1* appeared in 1952 and is regarded by most fans as the pinnacle of his comic book work. *Thun'da*, which chronicled the Edgar Rice Burroughs-type adventures of a man whose airplane crashes in a lost valley of prehistoric men and animals, was actually done by Frazetta to impress Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. with his work since he wanted to draw the *Tarzan* newspaper strip. When he didn't get the *Tarzan* strip, Frazetta went on to do the *Johnny Comet* strip in 1952, and when that feature folded, he began working for Al Capp in 1953 as an assistant on *Li'l Abner*, a position he held for nine years.

Curiously enough, Al Capp jealously guarded from public knowledge the fact that he employed assistants, even years after those assistants had stopped working for him. At a 1971 speaking engagement, someone approached Capp and asked him what it had been like working with Frank Frazetta. Capp appeared startled by the question and then inquired if the person were Frazetta's son. When the fan explained that he wasn't, Capp dismissed the question by replying that Frazetta was a prima donna who had only stayed on the strip for six months and who "hadn't worked out." Frazetta states that he was never bothered by Capp's not giving credit to his ghost artists. Frazetta contends that all he was doing was imitating Capp's style and would not have accepted a credit on the art even if it had been offered to him.

Following his stint on *Li'l Abner*, the artist did work for men's magazines such as *Cavalcade* and *Gent* and briefly joined in on *Playboy*'s "Little Annie Fanny" with Harvey Kurtzman, Will Elder and Jack Davis.

In the very early '60s, Frazetta began painting magazine covers for Jim Warren who was launching a line of black and white graphic story magazines that tried to retain the spirit of the defunct ECs. The tone for the early years of *Creepy* and *Eerie* was set by the paintings which have since gone on to become posters, puzzles and reprinted on occasion by Warren. Around 1969, Frazetta helped develop *Vampirella*, who went on to star in Warren's third horror-oriented title.

In fact, there has been an amusing story making the rounds ever since 1969 about the wholesalers' reaction to the first cover, featuring a very provocative shot of Vampi. They refused to distribute the book because it was obvious that Vampi had breasts and a crotch. Warren wondered what was so wrong with being anatomically correct. As a compromise, the wholesalers asked for the costume to cover up the body. Warren replied, "No. 'Cause if we cover them up we're going to ruin the character that Frank Frazetta created. And Frank gets very mad. And he's Italian. And he'll come and kill you."

It was during the '60s that Frazetta also did paperback cover paintings. He finally got a chance to do Tarzan and many of Burroughs' other characters for Ace. Then, a small company named Lancer asked him to do several paintings for their new series of books featuring a barbarian named Conan. Those covers helped bring attention to the savage Cimmerian and made him a household word.

His paintings began to appear elsewhere, including one sheet posters for such movies as *What's New Pussycat?*, *After the Fox*, *The Fearless Vampire Killers* and the Clint Eastwood thriller, *The Gauntlet*. For TV, he did several promotional pieces for ABC's *Battlestar: Galactica*.

Ironically, although he had done promotional art for many films, he had not become any more closely involved despite a few interesting offers. "Francis Ford Coppola called me," he recalls, "and he wanted me to get involved with *Apocalypse Now*. I've had a number of calls to get involved with films in some capacity or other, either as visual consultant or art director and I considered them. But Ralph came out and offered me a 50-50 deal, which is quite another story." Frazetta is clearly enthusiastic about the project, in its closing weeks of editing at the time of the interview.

"We co-produced and when I say that I mean we co-produced. I did a minimum of drawing, but I did a lot of teaching. I taught the animators how to draw like Frazetta, from the background artists right on down to the figure artists and the colorists. I also worked with the actors and the stuntmen and told them how I wanted them to move and look. I designed the costumes, put on makeup and directed in part with Ralph, and he's a real strong director."

Like previous Ralph Bakshi films, *Fire and Ice* was shot first with live actors allowing their actions to be rotoscoped by

A band of valiant freedom fighters enter a canyon while Nekkron's forces prepare to attack and slaughter the group.

A truly Frazetta-ish scene with Teegra inside Nekkron's icy fortress.

the animators and serve as a guide. "I worked with the actors," Frazetta explains, "and I really made them jump. I worked with them so that they would look, act and get the feel of the characters that I was doing, and they did a hell of a job.

"I had just about full control and the last word on the film, so I wasn't taking orders and I wasn't just doing my 'bit,' so to speak. Ralph said the 'Your's is the last word,' because what we were doing was a Frazetta movie and who knows Frazetta better than me? If we were doing a Ralph Bakshi movie and I were involved, well ok. But even if he'd made me a co-producer on a movie like that, how could I have the last word? But if you want to know how a Frazetta figure moves, you ask me. You want to know how they look, or how their eyes are shaped or how their hair moves and what a pack of wolves look like when they stalk you through the tall grass, you come to me.

"This is primarily what they were doing," he continues. "They were making a movie devoted to me and my work. It's kind of a tribute and I'm delighted. In all fairness, this is why I had the power.

"Many people came down to see what Ralph was doing and they were very skeptical. 'You're going to do Frazetta. Ha. Ha.' But they were really shocked at how beautiful the work looked. It's quite a first, I think. Some of the artists at Ralph's studio didn't see how it was possible and I guess I encouraged them to reach out and they pretty much surprised themselves with their growth in that period of time. They all learned to draw far better. They learned to paint better and to understand what I was doing in my work. It's incredible. So, they're all better artists now and I'm exhausted."

The screenplay for *Fire and Ice* was conceived by Bakshi and Frazetta, written by Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway (see page 30) and then rewritten by Frazetta and Bakshi to bring it more into line with what they had in mind. Originally, Thomas and Conway had misinterpreted the goal of the film and had written it to encompass virtually every painting Frazetta had ever done.

"Ralph would say that we want these Frazetta characters and these Frazetta scenes and we're going to make this work as a foil for that, but they overdid it by an awful lot," the designer observes. "We had to cut it down and really simplify it and just think in terms of one or two paintings to tell the story and not try to stick everything in there.

"I had a number of paintings that fit in. These would be the more primitive of my paintings, the ones with Neanderthals and monkeys to represent the villains and of course, my constant primitive girl, whom I've done a number of times, like in the Pellucidar series, with the black hair and scanty outfits.

"The hero is not very different than my barbarians or my lighter heroes with blond hair; the scrappy but vulnerable hero type. And then there's a second hero, the real standard type not unlike Conan. There are also witches, sorcerers, madmen, wicked queens, ogres, reptiles and wolves. There's everything. It looks like my paintings. It's rugged, barbaric, wonderful and sexy. It's all those things. The action is extremely realistic and believable. The backgrounds are incredibly beautiful. The artists did some really nice work. You're going to see this other world quality everywhere and beautiful figures *a la Frazetta* as much as possible.

"We've got a girl running around doing things that will blow your mind. The hero is a typical hero—wonderful, dynamic and incredible. And there's the meanest villain who is just running amuck all over the place. That sort of thing.

"Like I said, I trained the animators but I didn't do the animating myself. We're talking 700,000 frames! You know damn well I'm not going to sit around and touch up 700,000 frames. They did a fine job, but they're not me and I'm not them. No one can be exactly like me no matter how long they tried any more than I could be like them. But what they did is astounding."

At the time of the interview, Frazetta was still involved in the post-production editing and sound work on *Fire and Ice*. "I've seen different parts completed and the film is just about completed now. I'll be going back to L.A. in a week to go through the whole thing and pick out the bugs, so to speak. You overshoot, you know. It may drag in one spot and in another it may need some filling. Overall, at this point, I'd have to say that it's 85 percent excellent, and that the other few percent can probably be changed in the editing. But that's only personal. Ralph loves it all. He's crazy about the whole thing, but I'm a bit of a sticky wicket anyway. I'm looking at stuff that's supposed to look like mine and so, therefore, I'm going to be very tough on it. But Ralph would say, 'Frank, you're the only one in the world who would notice that,' and he's probably right.

"It is an adult film, not a kiddie film. Certainly, it's visually beautiful and kids should love it to death, and it has enough fast power that everybody should have a good time. It's not a hokey little animated film; it's quite a dazzling film. I think you'll be surprised. I feel that we've got a main character or two who would blow Conan out the window. Darkwolf may prove to be the ultimate hero. I don't imagine that anybody going into the theater will come out ho-humming it. They're going to get their money's worth. I like to feel that they're really going to flip over it." ■

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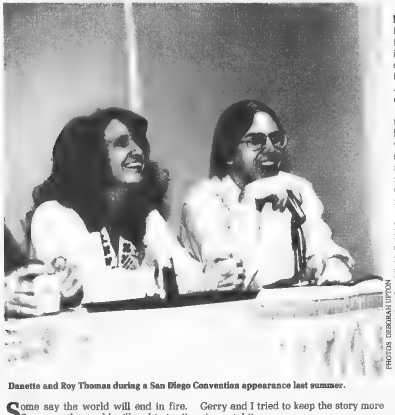
Conway & Thomas go Hollywood

By JEAN-MARC & RANDY LOFFICIER



PHOTOS: FRANK JULIANO

Danette and Roy Thomas during a San Diego Convention appearance last summer.

Some say the world will end in fire. Some say the world will end in ice." This line is from a Robert Frost poem once titled an *Avengers* story by Roy Thomas in which the Asgardian fire demon, Surtur, and the ice giant, Ymir, threatened to ravage the Earth.

The same line has now inspired the title of Ralph Bakshi's new animated feature, *Fire and Ice*. This was not a coincidence. According to Thomas, in his and co-writer Gerry Conway's script, the poem was even used to open Bakshi's film. "Although," says Thomas, "I'm not sure if that will be seen in the final version of the movie.

"It was our way to make it more than just another 'sword and sorcery film,'" Thomas adds. *"Fire and Ice* is not just a descendant of the Robert E. Howard kind of fiction, although that's one of the closest. There is also some of Tolkien there, and a lot of the Edgar Rice Burroughs type of fantasy, too. It's a combination of all of those, but, at the same time, Gerry and I tried to keep the story more elemental."

By their very nature, animated films tend to be more simplistic than live-action films. This is because they do not rely on actors to bring them to life. On the other hand, they can have fantastic worlds and wondrous effects less expensively. In this respect, they resemble comic books.

It, therefore, seems fitting that the first of Thomas and Conway's films to arrive on the screen should be an animated one. This in no way reflects the two writers' desires, since their first collaborative script, *Snow Fury*, written in 1979, was intended to be a live-action feature.

The script of *Fire and Ice* was also written as a live-action screenplay, at Ralph Bakshi's request, although it was always intended to be an animated film. "You have to call for visuals in an animated fantasy in the same way that you would call for visuals in a comic book," Conway explains. "They have to be very strong and very dramatic. They have to illuminate the characters and the story in an interesting way. Other than that, there is not as much similarity in writing an animated film and writing comics as one might expect."

"None of the scripts that we've done have actually been written as animated films," Thomas adds. "I enjoy writing films. It's a nice switch from writing comics and I look at it as a new challenge. I don't think that films are necessarily better, but they are something different. After 17 years in comics, I see it as a chance to stretch myself."

He and Conway share a similar attitude when it comes to writing. Thomas had been Conway's editor at Marvel, where both men collaborated on many stories. "Collaboration requires mutual respect," Conway states. "Roy and I respect each other very much, so working together on a screenplay was not very difficult."

If working together did not prove to be a problem, Thomas and Conway found that, in Hollywood, outside forces such as the director, the producer, and others, have much more say as to what goes into a story than a comic book editor or publisher. "You have much more freedom to do what you want in a comic book," acknowledges Conway. "But, on the other hand, in a comic book, you have much less room and fewer opportunities for character and story development."

Roy Thomas concurs, "I didn't care much for being a part of such a large creative team. If I ever get really into film, I would like to be a producer or a director/writer. When you are only a writer, your work is changed by all the other people. I don't mean that they are not good, or that the changes don't make sense, but it is just that your personal creative involvement becomes less."

Fire and Ice provides a good illustration of Thomas' beliefs. At the beginning, there was Ralph Bakshi, the creator of *Wizards* and of the film version of *Lord of the Rings*. There was also Frank Frazetta, whose interest in sword and sorcery is more that of an illustrative artist, as opposed to that of a director of other people's artwork. Thomas and Conway came in at an early stage to provide story concepts which tied in some of the things that Bakshi and Frazetta had conceived.

"We came up with the fire and ice motif," explains Thomas. "Strangely enough, different people came up with it. The one that counted the most was Gerry, but it was a combination of many things. My wife, Danette, had also suggested the name."

Both writers worked with Bakshi and Frazetta on the development of the characters and plot of the film, although they acknowledge the two creators' role. "It's really Ralph and Frank's movie much more than it is Gerry's and mine."

Gerry Conway laughs at a joke made by a fellow panelist at the same convention.

Thomas says. "At the same time, it would have been a far different movie if we had not worked on it."

Conway elaborates, "Ralph Bakshi is a man of very strong ideas. He has a very strong creative sense. When you have someone like that as your director, it can make for personal antagonism. Yet, at the same time, it can bring out a lot of creativity which might not have been brought out through working with someone else. I would rather work for Ralph Bakshi than for someone who might be easier to get along with but has fewer ideas to offer."

The experience has certainly not discouraged the partners. "As long as I can do it enough under my own terms," says Thomas, "and as long as the projects interest me, I want to continue to write movie scripts."

The two writers are now working on Dino de Laurentiis' *Conan II*. Since the first film already told the story of the barbarian's origin, Thomas feels less excited than one would surmise. "We're not really bringing Conan to life, we're just helping to keep him from dying, you might say!" he quips. The partners intend to stick more closely to the original Robert E. Howard version than John Milius did. "Not to denigrate what Milius did, but I think that he was more interested in creating his own character than we are," Conway explains.

They have also just completed a general purpose spoof screenplay for Warner Brothers. This had originally been commissioned for the *Mad Movie* project (legal complications apparently now prevent the use of the name).

Whether working on somebody else's idea or conjuring their own stories, Thomas and Conway feel that they have learned a great deal from the five scripts that they have done so far. "I look at each of these scripts as a learning device," comments Thomas. "I feel we're going to be learning a lot in these next couple of weeks, as we work on *Conan!*" ■

Jean-Marc & Randy Lofficier write about media for both American and European publications.

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A Comic Book Comes "Alive"

Fire and Ice is animator Ralph Bakshi's most ambitious film to date. Based on the artwork of Frank Frazetta, the action-adventure also is Bakshi's last attempt at realistic animation. . . . for now, anyhow.

By ED NAHA

Lush jungles are surrounded by wintery vistas. Noble warriors fall prey to savage sub-humans. Dragonhawks roam the skies. The power of magic is omnipresent. It is an elemental world, simple yet complex; a world that sparks a collision between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, of good and evil, of fire and ice.

Fire and Ice is animator-producer-director Ralph Bakshi's latest animated feature film and, according to Bakshi, is "the best movie we've ever done." A sword and sorcery epic that smacks of the pulp adventures of the 1930s, *Fire and Ice* is undoubtedly Bakshi's most cohesive effort to date. On this outing he has utilized some of the finest talent in the various fantasy realms. The story was penned by Marvel and DC comics' veterans Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway (see page 30). The look of the film was dictated by veteran artist Frank Frazetta (see page 25).

It is, in Bakshi's own words, "a comic book come to life. . . a very classy comic book."

THE LAIR OF BAKSHI

Ralph Bakshi does not look like a controversial sort of fellow. Slumped in a chair in his small studio complex north of Hollywood, he seems to be a man obsessed by his work. A robust, bear of a human with droopy eyes and a rubbery, expressive face, Bakshi expresses both excitement and caution when talking about his newest brainchild.

Over the years, Bakshi has, via his audacious approach to animation, impressed and/or outgraged nearly every film and animation buff in America. Recalling such past works as *Fritz the Cat*, *Heavy Traffic*, *Coonskin*, *Hey Cool Lookin'*, *Wizards*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *American Pop* and the controversy surrounding each, he blinks his eyes in an almost "who me?" manner. It's difficult to separate the movies from the maelstroms.

"I don't know why I'm always called controversial," Bakshi says. "I'm not a maverick. To be an artist, to work in the animation art form, is an *adventure*. I've always been intrigued by that. I try never to duplicate what I've done before. I'd get bored doing that. I can't re-do things over and over again the way Disney has. I'm not knocking Disney. I love Disney. But I couldn't do another *Fritz the Cat*. I've done that. I won't do another *Heavy Traffic*.

"Each film of mine was done out of necessity. I've always been trying to find a new way for animation to go. I haven't been searching for that direction because audiences need it. I've been doing that because I need it as an artist and a director.

Ralph Bakshi, director.

"I think the controversy about my career has arisen from some of the outrageous techniques I've used and the chances I've taken. I've done movies that have been successful and others that haven't. I think a lot of people were put off by my not taking the success and, then, imitating them in following films. I think I upset them by veering from subject to subject. I can't be sure. Who knows?

"I'm glad I've run my career that way, though. I never would have worked with Frank Frazetta if I'd decided to do *Fritz the Cat* over and over again. I've always wanted to move forward, to push animation to its limits. Those limits haven't even been approached yet.

"You know, there's a lot of lip service paid today to 'oh let's see what we can do that's new in animation.' Yet, 1982 saw The Secret of *NIMH* released. I'm not putting that movie down but what is *NIMH*? What's new about that? What's animation doing that's new?

"Comic books have progressed further than screen animation has. Within the world of comics you find realism, funny animals, superheroes, every visual category imaginable. I guess I'm basically a comic book person.

"I don't know why my approach is considered controversial. Maybe I unsettle people. I don't like controversy. It defeats peace of mind. It's difficult to work in a whirlwind. Yet, it seems to be the way I've lived my whole life. Going back to my childhood, there was controversy on even a neighborhood level. If everyone was going to Brooklyn Heights High, I was going to art school. If everyone else was shooting pool, I was playing tennis.

"I've never looked for controversy. Not in *Fritz*, not in *Heavy Traffic*, not in Coonskin, not in any of my films. I've always been honest in expressing exactly what I feel. I also seek *adventure*."

Bakshi smiles slightly, underscoring the word "adventure" with the arching of a bushy eyebrow.

BAKSHI'S ADVENTURE

Fire and Ice is a quintessential comic book odyssey. A strange world is divided between a lush equatorial region and an ever-approaching ice age. Moving glaciers are slowing wiping out humanity.

These traveling glaciers are not a natural phenomenon, however. They are controlled by the evil ruler of Ice Peak, Lord Nekkron. He, in turn, is ruled by his menacing mother, Queen Juliana. Nekkron and Juliana are bent on global conquest. With their ice mountains ripping apart the world, they send messengers to their last remaining enemy, good King Jarol, ruler of Fire Keep. They demand his surrender.

While Nekkron's men are being received, however, a few of the Ice Peak team kidnap Jarol's daughter, Princess Teegra. Although the kidnapping is a success, the plucky girl eludes her captors and escapes, fleetingly, to a lost city. There, she meets a lone young warrior, Tarn. Tarn has watched his people massacred by Nekkron's sub-human warriors and, understandably miffed, has vowed revenge.

Before the two young people get to exchange details of their woeful stories, Teegra is recaptured by Nekkron's minions and Tarn is left for dead.

A mysterious warrior, Lone Wolf, appears and, saving Tarn, coaches him in fighting skills. By the end of the film, the glaciers are bearing down on Fire Keep. Tarn and the enigmatic Lone Wolf prepare to rescue Teegra, King Jarol and his son, Taro, also mount an offensive against the forces of black magic.

The climax is a literal mixing of fire and ice and brings the larger-than-life painting style of Frank Frazetta to the screen in breathtakingly bold strokes.

"I've wanted to do this kind of movie for years," Bakshi explains. "When I first came to Hollywood a decade or so ago, I was trying to sell two films: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Conan*. I was the first one to hold the rights to *Conan*. I couldn't sell those films.

"The year before I started *Fritz*, when I was still back in New York, I wanted to do something, anything, in the sword and sorcery genre. I got together with Jack Davis, Wally Wood, Gray Morrow, Roy J. Krenkel and Joe Kubert and formed a studio. We tried to put together a series of sword and sorcery ideas for, of all people, Paramount television. I couldn't sell anybody on the concept back then. It was during that time period that Wally created his *Wizard King*. It was sort of an adaptation of Tolkien. We were all mesmerized by the *Rings* back then. Our studio was short-lived. We never got a presentation off in time. It was a beautiful bunch of guys, though. I returned everyone's material to them and, then, set off for Hollywood.

"Finally, about eight years later, I got the chance to do *Rings*. Now, the *Rings* was basically a very British type of sword and sorcery adventure film. Towards the end of it, because of the wealth of dialogue and the difficult language, I began to yearn to do an American sword and sorcery movie. Something that was very comic-book oriented. After the *Rings*, I wanted to do something that was simpler in storyline, more energetic less verbose. *Rings* is literature. After a couple of years of that, I was dreaming of Conan and Burroughs."

In 1979, Bakshi decided to turn his dream into a reality.

METHOD AND MAYHEM

Following the release of *Rings*, Bakshi began work on his next motion picture, a slice of Americana called *American Pop*. Even during *Pop*'s production, Bakshi couldn't shake the idea of doing an adventure film dealing with magic. He decided that, in order to make the best film fantasy possible, he'd have to collaborate with the master of fantasy artists, Frank Frazetta.

"There's no great mystery about my being drawn to Frazetta," Bakshi shrugs. "Frank is, basically, the finest fantasy illustrator alive. You couldn't deal in sword and sorcery without knowing who Frank is. Some of the *Rings* is Frazetta-inspired. Basically, I wanted to do a Frazetta movie. Why should I go around asking people to imitate his style when I could ask Frazetta to do the movie himself?

Tarn discovers some mystic runes that will lead him to vanquishing Nekkron's forces.

A band of freedom fighters enter an icy pass, unknowingly walking into an ambush.

"We had never actually met but we had a lot of mutual friends. We were always missing each other at people's houses. I figured, 'why not just ask him?' Why should I've been embarrassed about it? I'm a guy from Brooklyn. He's a guy from Brooklyn. No sweat. I called him. I told him I'd love to work with him. Frank liked the *Rings* very much. If nothing else, that movie proved that realistic animation could work. The art form that I'm trying to create is neither cartoon nor exaggerated. It's an art form of realism. I'm trying to take the same license on the screen with animation that Frank takes when he does a painting."

Frazetta agreed to the partnership and the master illustrator and the movie maker met. "Frank and I discussed the kinds of characters we wanted...Then, we brought in Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway and discussed it with them. They came up with a story and, while writing it, consulted with Frank and I periodically. It was the ideal collaborative effort. No egoing out.

"We knew from the beginning that the trick with this movie was to keep it moving. After the *Rings*, I had dealt with enough dialogue to last me the rest of my life. If we have 100 lines of dialogue in this film, it's a lot. The movie is a mover.

"Roy and Gerry wrote more dialogue than actually made it into the film but I'm sure they expected some to be edited out. I love their stuff. They're comic book writers. They know how to say a lot with very little. They get right to the point. It's sheer simplicity. This is really a moving comic book. We don't waste time talking. I love action. Frank loves action. Audiences love action. Animation works best when it moves, right? *American Pop* lagged in certain portions because the one thing we could never lick, even working with rotoscoping and realistic art, was the problem of dialogue. Animated faces cannot sustain prolonged emotional dialogue exchanges.

"We've come up with a storyline that is simple but not simplistic, it's epic without being awesome. I was looking for pure comic book, not an intellectual approach to what comic books are. If you slapped a comic book cover on this movie you could sell it tomorrow as a high quality comic book, along the lines of the old EC books.

"Frank and I wanted to make this simple as opposed to awesome. *Rings* proved to me that you don't need a thousand people running over a hill to make a dramatic point. In fact, in today's animation, I think it's better to take the opposite approach.

"It's very difficult to compete with live action films in terms of scope. One of the things that has changed recently in terms of animation being an alternative to live action is the amount of visual tricks live action films can accomplish that they never could before. Special effects today are mind-boggling. They take my breath away. I love them. For animation to compete with live action, we have to reassess the dramatic impact of animation and come up with new approaches of putting it on the screen. Magic used to be ours exclusively. No more.

"We have to come up with new methods of magic. There's no reason for animation to exist today just for the sake of animation. When Disney first started, animation was a new thing and he was the best at it. A genius. But, and this is an important but, people used to go to see an animated feature because they could go see drawings move. Sure, there had to be a story but the fact that these cartoon characters were moving on the screen was the main attraction. Motion was magic. That attraction isn't there anymore.

"The thrill is gone. We've all seen Bugs Bunny. That's played out. Special effects in live action films have made it seemed more played out.

"So, for me as an animator, my task is to think 'what can we do that will make audiences want to see this film for some other reason than it moves?' It was that line of thought that first made me want to try illustration in animation, to push it to its visual limits. It was that sort of thinking that allowed me to ignore the criticism.

"Basically, I'm pushing for realism in animation. I know that's something you're not supposed to do, a real no-no, but when I was dreaming of this movie, I kept on looking at all those great old pulp covers and all those famous realistic artists who worked for comic books like Neal Adams, and wondering 'now, why can't I bring *that* to life?'

"I'm trying to get animation to a level of realism that allows the audience to believe what's happening on the screen yet present them with what live action can't do in terms of color and exaggerated action.

"*American Pop* was an experiment. I'm always willing to experiment. I think *Fire and Ice* justifies all my previous experimentation. We had 100 great artists working here at the studio. I know they've finally crossed the realism line with this movie."

WORK BEGINS

Theories worked out, artists hired and script in hand, Bakshi led Frazetta into his crowded studio complex . . . an animation factory that must have proved unsettling to the master illustrator. Bakshi tried to make Frazetta's entrance as untraumatic as possible.

"The biggest problem for me as a director," he says, "was to figure out how to use Frank to the film's greatest advantage. There were millions of drawings, thousands of scenes. That's a mass of confusion for anyone just walking into a situation like this. My first responsibility was to figure out what to ask Frank. You can't waste his time.

"A lot of great artists who've worked for animation companies wind up seeing the finished product and asking 'where's my work?' That's because some art director had them working on the root of a tree while a couple of dozen artists were screwing up the character. I had to look at the film directorially and figure, 'now, if Frank drew *that* and *that* and designed *this* but not *this* . . . we'll be in good shape.' Why have him work on something that's only going to be seen for five seconds?

"The challenge of bringing Frank's characters to life was Frank's responsibility. He did all the initial designs and the artists worked from his sketches. If an animator wasn't drawing like Frazetta, Frank sat down and drew the character in that scene. If an animator was off-model on a Frazetta character, Frank would go over to the desk and show the guy how to draw the muscles correctly. Whatever.

"Frank was the key artist. It was a case of bringing an artist into a factory situation and using his art as the key cog to get the machinery working."

Aiding Frazetta and the art crew in realizing the dramatic graphics of *Fire and Ice* was the fact that Bakshi filmed the entire production with live actors before the first pen was put to paper.

"We didn't film the giant monsters and lizards and stuff live," Bakshi laughs, "but we did do all the human scenes. It was pretty funny. There was no way we could ever find men or women who looked or moved like Frazetta drawings. So, we used little tricks. For the big leaps, we had the actors bouncing off trampolines. For really spirited battle scenes, we had them whopping each other with rolled up newspapers. It hurt less, so they flailed away more.

"When I was shooting the live scenes, Frank was on the set. If there were major action scenes, I'd discuss every move with Frank. We knew that there was no way we could duplicate Frank's art 'live.' People are not built the way Frazetta paints. That didn't matter too much in that a lot of what the actors were doing was going to be retranslated in the drawings anyway via rotoscoping. We do no trace live actors in this movie, by the way. At times, in the past, we *have* traced live action but that was basically because individual animators needed that crutch. It was a lack of ability that led to that practice.

"With this movie, however, everyone was well trained. There was going to be animated exaggeration of muscle and shape. The actress who played Teegra, for instance, looks nothing like the finished animated character.

"The exaggeration all took place at the animator's desk. Plus, I created a lot of the Frazetta atmosphere live through camera angles that amplified the action. A lot of it was directorial. A Frazetta painting is basically a high moment in a series of events, a climax caught and frozen. If you keep that in mind, you then can lead up and follow that moment in an equally impressive manner. The leaps in this movie all had to be Frazetta leaps. The fights Frazetta fights."

The finished look of *Fire and Ice* is closely akin to a Frank Frazetta retrospective. There are scenes both heroic and melodramatic that are reminiscent of his best known illustrations. Bakshi credits the finished look of the film to the almost kamikaze dedication of his staff.

"My animators are great," he beams. "Great. They're also crazy. What Disney animators get in comparison to what they get is sinful. It's been very frustrating for me, as head of a small, independent company, to not have the financial wherewithall to pay these people what they deserve. They've done amazing stuff with little time, little money and, for a while, little equipment.

"*Fire and Ice* cost us $4-5 million. That's not a lot of money. It's even less when you consider that you're working without the support systems that a major studio backer can give you. With a studio behind you you have the right to make a mistake and, then, do it over. You can re-budget a scene. *The Black Cauldron* (a seemingly never-ending Disney production) is costing upwards of $14 million. I think *The Fox and the Hound* cost about that much. *NIMH* came in about $7 million. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with our films because they cost less. I'm saying that our artists work twice as hard and are twice as creative. I'm really proud of these people.

"I can't tell you how happy I am with this

Turn and Teegra at Fire Keep, the last refuge for heat, light and good. Notice the attention to detail by the animators.

Teegra is chained by Nekkron and struggles to free herself before Fire Keep falls and her father and all she loves are slaughtered

film. Who knows? Maybe we'll actually attract people into theaters who don't normally go see animated features. You know, the kind of people who don't like cartoons!"

Bakshi lets out a barking laugh . . . enough of a sly chuckle to let you know that he's still subversive after all these years.

BEYOND FIRE AND ICE

Aside from its artistic merits, one of the most extraordinary things about *Fire and Ice* is that it marks, for now, Ralph Bakshi's animation swan song.

"Yeah," Bakshi acknowledges. "I'm leaving the field for a while. See how I react to people as a director."

Bakshi is currently mulling a host of live action projects from black comedies to a live *Red Sonja* for Dino DeLaurentiis. Why is Bakshi retreating from animation, a cause he's championed for nearly two decades?

"I want to take some time to think," he explains. "I'm happy with *Fire and Ice*'s realism. Very happy. Ecstatically happy. Now, I have to address myself to the question of animation's next step. Where should it go now? I have to distance myself from the art form in order to figure that out. I think I have all the answers but I need the time to develop them. I want to see animation do something extraordinary."

Bakshi's face seems to reflect a sudden twinge of world-weariness. "I also want to get away from the business end of things. I'm tired of running a studio at the same time as trying to be an artist. I can't do both. It's devastating. It's self-defeating. I want to be as creative as possible from now on. When I go into animation again, in five or seven or ten years, I want to have a partnership created around me so I'll never have to worry about budgeting, accountants or lawyers again.

"Being the sole owner of Bakshi Productions has been a real burden. Knowing how much each pencil is costing you as you're working on a movie takes a lot of the magic away. It's a strange position to be in. As a director, I want to tell the animators to take an extra week with that important scene. Yet, as the producer, I know the bookkeeper is screaming at me that we can't even afford the pencils!

"With live action, I'll be working with other producers. I can create. Let them bang their heads against the wall." Bakshi heaves a contented sigh. The walls around him are littered with posters and sketches from his small but memorable body of work. Bar room floozies from *American Pop*. Hooded warriors from *Wizards*. Muscle-laden heroes from *Fire and Ice*.

When asked to sum up his contribution to animation, Bakshi smiles. "I think I showed the varied directions that animation could take. Realism. Satire. Black comedy. Sword and sorcery. The possibilities of animation are limitless. I'm not talking about techniques but subject matter. I've tackled a lot of different genres. I tried to show the world that animation wasn't one dimensional, that it was a director's medium as opposed to a producer's medium, that you could express yourself as a director in an animated film the way you could in live action.

"When you think about pictures like *Heidi's Song* or *NIMH*, you're dealing with films that are group efforts in terms of expression. Then, look at *Heavy Traffic* or *Coonskin*. There you see a director's viewpoint. I mean, I was the *first* person to put ethnic animated characters on the screen. Now, you don't think too much of that. It's pretty much accepted. But then? A Jew on the screen? An Italian. Animated characters with sexual hang-ups?"

His face lights up. "Amazing!"

Leaving his office for one of the few final business meetings required to close a distribution deal on *Fire and Ice*, Bakshi shambles out into the hall, offering one last stray thought. "I've tried to bring a sense of vitality to animation, of variety. In one sense, though, I've failed. I've never made that *classic* animated film where everything's been *perfect*, where *everything has clicked*."

He passes by Frazetta paintings on his way out. "That's still my goal." ■

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At the Reunion

By HOWARD CRUSE

In the pocket of my parka, my fingers play with the edges of the folded invitation. Stopping on the side walk at the door of Manhattan's Allegorical Affectation Association building, I pull out the invitation and check the printed address against the numbers on the granite edifice. Yep, this is the place.

As soon as I received my notice of this Reunion, I knew I'd have to come. Friends of mine dating back to 1950 would be there. I'm always fascinated to see old chums, to observe how some have grown and developed, how others remain unchanged. Sometimes you pay a price, finding comrades who once seemed fascinating to be dull now, their superficial brilliance no longer able to hide the emotional vacancy underneath. Such discoveries are likely to be particularly sobering at tonight's party, since everyone in attendance will actually be me.

Or *partially* me. Me at different ages, in different states of mind. Me being real; me being phony. Playful me, earnest me, jockeying for affection, attention, grasping for fame.

Cartoon characters, every one of them. Tonight's the reunion of all my children, the characters I've drawn since my first hugged a Crayola. How will I relate to them? I wonder as I enter the hallway and follow the sounds of music. Will we still have anything in common?

I hang up my coat, turn, and my eye instantly zooms to Landie Lucker, oldest and most crudely rendered of them all. Landie Lucker? Where could that name have come from? From what ethnic lineage could it have arisen?) I was in Miss Margaret's first-grade class when I first drew Landie. He consists entirely of circles and ovals tenuously joined, with no elbows or knee joints to be seen. Nor fingers, nor even hands; certainly no feet. He still wears the blue crayon Danskin that hugs his elliptical torso from neck to crotch. The exploit of Landie's that most impressed Miss Margaret, I recall, was an epic battle with a tornado.

"And don't forget, I was a multimedia character," Landie reminds me. It's true. I had a plastic toy that resembled my cartoon Landie and who starred in the live-action puppet movies I used to create when I was alone and unwatched in my bedroom.

What goes through your mind when you meet up with all the people you created?

"Is the other Landie here?" I ask. But even as I speak I see Landie the Second across the room chatting with Big Marvy. I remember how Landie Lucker II of the second grade had been embarrassed by the more primitive Landie of the first, the way my older brother Allan had been embarrassed when I intruded into his fourth grade world. Sometimes I'd carry a note to his teacher from mine, and Allan would berate me afterwards for my stride, which was making his classmates snicker. It seems I bounced too much when I walked. I strove to improve.

Poor Landie the First couldn't do much about his flaws, though. He was merely a scrawl, whereas Landie II had character definition consisting of a nose, an overbite and three hairs.

But sibling conflicts aside, the two Landie Luckers possessed a kind of purity missing in my later characters. They were created only for fun, and were imitative of no one. I was still too uncalculating to plagiarize, and I hadn't yet learned that you could get paid for drawing pictures.

By the time I was eight, I had lost my innocence. My folks had spilled the beans: Marge wasn't drawing *Marge's Little Lulu* just for kicks! (She wasn't drawing *Little Lulu* at all by then, but who knew from John Stanley in those days?) I was quickly seized by a precocious professionalism. Everything I drew was aimed at high-profile national exposure. And I had discovered India ink, so watch out!

I remember my reckless pursuit of graphic flash as I watch poor Spiffy toddling awkwardly through the Reunion crowd. Ever youthful, severely deformed, plopped into a *Little Lotta* world of perpetual whimsy, Spiffy was my first character to be self-consciously designed. Like Nancy or Lolly, his face was a two-dimensional construct; angles other than your basic full face, three-quarter view, or profile were to be avoided. His mammoth chest tapered to a crotch positioned at what would be calf level on normal people; his pelvis was supported by stuffy legs resembling Slinkies in repose. I'm embarrassed to speak to him, being the author of his distortions, but Landie Lucker quips that Spiffy has gone on to a career as a tackle dummy for the University of Alabama football squad.

There's a tap on my shoulder. It's Gilbert! Cocky Gilbert, bragging before we've finished our hug.

"I was your first character to have his own logo!" he reminds me.

I nod. "You're so right!"

Young cartoonists be warned: once you get into logos, you're hooked. One of my favorite stages in the creation of a new feature is still the rendering of the logo, that special lettering of the strip's title. Having a logo implies having a future. Today's adventure will be followed by tomorrow's, each capped by that familiar trademark. Human beings should have logos; it's good for morale.

I remember Gilbert for his unprecedented longevity. "You must have drawn more than 100 daily strips about me," he beams.

"I took you through at least three adventures," I respond. "You were my answer to *Li'l Abner*. I read an article in *Life* about all of his crazy episodes. . . ."

"Yeah, but then you got too ambitious and tried to add a Sunday strip," Gilbert smirks.

How well I remember. I thought I'd enjoy the challenge of those Sunday formats, where you have to be able to reassemble and crop the panels in all these different ways and some panels are optional and the whole thing is expendable since some papers only use the strip on weekdays—but ugh! It was too much trouble for a 10-year-old. My interest in Gilbert waned; then I discovered *Mad*, and for a while, it was satire magazines or nothing for Howie.

I was lured back to comic strips when a chance arose to actually get into print. Dad was buddies with the editor of the weekly St. *Clair County Reporter*, an offset newspaper that could print drawings without paying for expensive engravings. I was 12 and primed for fame. *Calvin* was born, and survived for more than a year.

Calvin's visual similarity to *Little Lulu* was practically actionable. The characters owed as much to the Moppet household as to the Cruse family, but there was a bit of young Howie in the pompadoured Calvin. I was beginning to learn to let my real self peer from behind my characters, though I'd quickly dodge back behind the paper cliches if I thought anyone was catching on to my game.

I retired Calvin when I went to boarding school. But I resurrected him later as a foil for *Thom*, a miniature dinosaur who starred in my imitation of Crockett Johnson's *Barnaby*. I completed 18 *Thom* strips and sent them to every syndicate in America. There were no takers. Calvin was displessed by his demotion to a secondary role and stopped speaking to me. We greet each other perfunctorily at the Reunion tonight, but there is no warmth.

Momentarily, I stand alone and scan the old faces. There's Reuben, canine mascot of the Indian Springs school newspaper, and Poor Willoughby, star of another failed comic strip that made syndicate editors yawn during my college days. And then there's. . . Mary Bean.

"Remember me?" she coos.

Mary Bean the heartbreaker. She still looks like Charlie Brown in drag; her mournful prototype made it into the May 1964 issue of *Sick*. I liked her mournful mug and sent samples of a comic strip version to Publisher's-Hall. To my shock, they wrote back for more and said they were considering it seriously.

I was in heaven. Also petrified. Was this *it*? My *big* break?

It wasn't. Pressured for more output, I couldn't maintain the quality. My greenness showed. I was politely dissolected.

But *Mary Bean* was tantalizingly close to a creative breakthrough. However derivative Mary's appearance, I was drawing on my own melancholia, not Charlie Brown's. Still, the honesty was adulterated as I went through the paces that syndication seemed to require. Was I ever going to learn to be me?

"You didn't know who you were in real life," says Mary Bean with a friendly jabbing finger. "How were you gonna know what to put on paper?"

"I'll tell you who Howard Cruse was in 1964," horns in King Plentywaist of Mudblebrow, a chubby monarch who wears a fur-trimmed regal robe over Dr. Denton pajamas. "He was a self-absorbed infant who thought he deserved to be king of the world!"

"Now that's not fair!" I object. "It's *true*, but it's not *fair*!" The king snickers, but I press on. "I was able to see those things in myself and laugh at them. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to draw *you*!"

He can't deny that. I'd begun looking at myself with an ever more critical gaze in those days. As a result, instead of drawing variations on *Li'l Abner* or *Barnaby*, I'd begun caricaturing myself. I first drew Plentywaist in *The King's Plot*, a 24-segment Christmas strip which I foolishly thought could replace *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* from its annual holiday slot in the *Birmingham News*. No dice. True, the feature was subsequently bought by a fringe syndicate which claimed to have placed it in a paper in New Zealand (no kidding!), but I wasn't satisfied. I revived King Plentywaist in 1968 bid for syndication, but *Mudblebrow* bounced like a rubber check.

That was when I gave up. I forswore cartooning and tried to settle into a nice quiet life in Birmingham as a total failure. That didn't last, though. Instead, I got involved with two squirrels, thanks to my unquenchable craving to somehow, somewhere, get my stuff into bloody print!

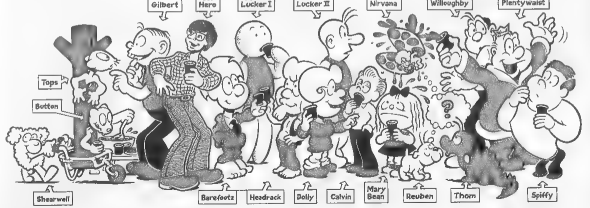
I'd compromise! I'd hack! No more Mr. Idealist!

I got analytical. Deferring any notions of cracking the sacred page, I decided to produce filler, something a local paper could stick anywhere. I played with a vertical shape, one column, four inches deep. I drew a tree in it. Two squirrels stuck their heads the tree and said stupid jokes to each other. Corny? Insufferably so. I'd draw an animal panel so dumb and primitive that readers who disdained by clever intellectual strips and subtle draftsmanship would be bound to love it!

Tops & Button found its way into the *Birmingham Post-Herald* in 1970, and surprise! Before its two-year run was over, I'd grown proud of it. For in the course of drawing its 600-plus daily panels, I accidentally learned how to put Howard Cruse on paper.

Trying to be crude, I'd abandoned borrowed riffs, and slowly, involuntarily, my diagrammatic characters blossomed with their own unique personalities. A crew of supporting players materialized; one of them, an outrageous lamb named Shearwell, damn near took over the show.

Tops & Button was uneven, self-indulgent, awkward and genuine—a map of my mind as I rebuilt my cartooning confidence. From its lessons sprang *Bare-*



Mr Cruse has been given a free hand to express his thoughts and ideas in any manner he wishes within the scope of this publication. This column does not necessarily represent the editorial views of COMICS SCENE nor our philosophy. The contents are © 1983 by Howard Cruse.

footz, and Barefootz in turn opened many of the doors I'd banged on for so long.

These last guys are the ones that nurtured me now. Not Landie Lucker, who was a childhood playmate but little more. Not Mary Bean, the wistful presence still trapped beneath the face of Charlie Brown.

No, for really rich conversation around the Reunion punch bowl I turn to the characters of recent years. Barefootz: ever an enigma, the dreamy me barely coping with the cockroaches of life. Dolly: obsessively lusty and sharp as a tack. Headrack: the artist who shares all of my creative tortures, the gutsy rebel who dared to be gay in print before I did. Shearwell: the hellion I'm too decorous to be. Li'l Nirvana: the butterfly with the dewy innocence of an Alabama boy who's still making puppet movies in an expanded bedroom.

And there's a new generation of characters who've left behind the circles and ovals of Walter T. Foster's how-to-draw books. They look realer; in some ways they are. No google eyes, big heads or warped physiques in sight.

Still, "reality" in a cartoon is illusory. It's only lines on paper stimulating recognition in a reader's mind. Will Eisner's fully-rendered derelict and Mell Lazarus's scribbled Momma each do their job. For the artists know themselves and draw from their own reality. The things in their art that are universal and true connect with the reader's emotional reality. Retreads and swipes aren't enough; it takes truth to make the real sparks fly. Which takes self-knowledge and the honesty to share what the artist has discovered within himself.

I'm mulling over this when I turn and find myself facing the plaid-shirted character in glasses who you'll find above the title of this very column. I've drawn him many times; his name is the same as mine. I've cast him in blatantly fictional adventures labeled as autobiography; I've mocked him, abused him, toyed with his dignity and laughed at his sadness. But our relationship remains good-natured.

"How's the cartooning business? I ask.

"Rotten!" laughs the cartoon Howard Cruse. His defenses are down, thanks to the late hour and the punch. "The recession is breaking my back, my drawing leaves a lot to be desired, and I'm still not sure that I've figured out who the hell I am!"

"Well, you'll do alright," I reassure him. "Just do like me and fake your way through. Most everybody's in the same boat anyway."

"You're probably right," Howard Cruse sighs, scooping for lemon peels in the punch bowl dregs. Sometimes I wish I were in his shoes. If he thinks life is tough for a cartoon character, he should try a few days as a real human being. ■

COMING IN STARLOG #69

It's a short time ago in a galaxy not very far away and a small band of filmmakers has completed one of the most eagerly-awaited motion pictures of the decade, *Return of The Jedi*. This issue, we feature the latest chapter of the *Star Wars* saga in an exclusive preview with all-new never-before-seen color photos. *Jedi* producer Howard Kazanjian discusses the problems of lensing the top-secret outer-space adventure while the Man in the Golden Mask— Anthony Daniels—reveals just what it's like portraying C-3PO and living in the shadow of Dudley Moore. (No kidding!)

Plus a visit inside your radio to the National Public Radio studios where the currently-broadcast, all-in-sound adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back* is taped. . . and a far-ranging talk with SF author James Kahn about his dual roles: novelizing *Return of The Jedi* and *Poltergeist*, acting in *E.T.*

* * * * *

Tom Mankiewicz, the screenwriter behind *Live and Let Die* and *Superman*, theorizes on just how James Bond, Agent 007, should cash his chips. And he checks in with us on his own newest project, an all-new theatrical version of the caped crusader. The Batman. Holy Moley, Boy Wonder!

* * * * *

Greg Hildebrandt, one-half of the world's greatest fantasy illustration team, discusses his professional split (with twin brother Tim) and why each has gone on to create separate universes. It's a candid interview, profusely-illustrated with some breathtaking new visions from Greg's solo brush.

* * * * *

Plus: the joys of nuclear holocaust as our own Ed Naha hits the L.A. Off-beat on *The Day After*. . . an on-target view of galactic shoot-outs from our Bob Martin in the latest Space-Age Games . . . a fond farewell from Bjo Trimble. . . and an incredible challenge from David Gerrold. . . to *you*.

And a behind-the-scenes look at the special effects of the fantasy spectacular, *The Dark Crystal*. . . part two of David Hutchison's Walking Tour into the world of imagination at EPCOT. . . a photo-filled retrospective of the World Fantasy Con. . . and news about the newest in 3-D films.

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A fond look back at one of the most exciting adventure strips of all

By RON GOULART

The *Terry and the Pirates* comic strip officially ended 10 years ago in February. There are those, however, who feel it died quite a few years earlier. At the end of 1946, to be exact, when Milton Caniff gave it up for the greener pastures of Steve Canyon. Since I'm one of those who holds that opinion, we'll be concentrating in the following pages on the Terry of 1934 through 1946, the years when Caniff was producing just about the best adventure strip ever.

"Introducing Terry and the Pirates," announced the first panel in the very first daily in October of 1934. "Terry is a wide awake American boy whose grandfather left him a map of an abandoned mine in China." Accompanying the youthful Terry through his adventures will be Pat Ryan, "two-fisted adventurer," the Chinese guide George Webster Confucious, "better known as Connie;" plus pretty Dale Scott and her crusty father, who bore the inevitable name of Ol'Pop. In order to live up to the new strip's name, Caniff included in the cast a gang of Chinese river pirates headed by Poppy Joe, "a half-caste who has learned of the treasure." The early weeks of the strip, as Terry and Pat arrived in China and venture upriver in quest of the hidden treasure, had a wide-open cartoony appearance and a wide-eyed boys' adventure book plot. There were few hints of what Terry would look and sound like in another year or so.

Ron Goulart is one of the most prolific writers in the world today and a respected comics historian.

During his first year in the Orient, Caniff had separate continuities going in his Sunday page. In the first Sunday adventure, Pat and Terry are sailing along the China coast in a steamer "laden with a rich cargo." Sure enough, the steamer is captured by pirates. And this batch of sinister Asiatic brigands is not led by a man. "Luvva Pete," exclaims Terry, "We're captured by a WOMAN!" It's none other than the Dragon Lady, making her debut on December 16, 1934, delivering these lines: "So! It is Amelican gentleman who resists so brashly—I am no su'plished!" Besides speaking movie Chinese, the Dragon Lady is noticeably flat-chested. Gradually both her diction and her bosom would improve.

"Why not . . . make the Number One menace a woman?" Caniff recalls asking himself at the time he was inventing the cast. "One who combines all the best features of past moustache-twirlers with the lure of a handsome wench. There was a woman pirate along the China Coast at one time, so it isn't beyond reality. She's fabulously wealthy. Lai Choi San means 'Mountain of Wealth.' That's too much for readers to remember. Call her that once to establish atmosphere, but the Occidentals have nicknamed her the Dragon Lady."

After the Dragon Lady, Caniff brought in a Sunday villain straight out of the silent serials. A chap in a black robe and death's head mask who aptly called himself the Skull. About this point, Caniff must have had to make some sort of decision as to whether he could keep Terry a "luvva Pete" kid or let him grow up.

Fortunately, he was sharing a Manhattan studio with the late Noel Sickles and the things Sickles was accomplishing with *Scorchy Smith* (see COMICS SCENE #1) began to stimulate Caniff. "My job was not dull, but it consumed the physically

This Sunday page from 1943 shows a patriotic Terry before he was to get involved in the service.

Terry's early adventures were filled with derring-do and many aerial exploits.

available day," Caniff has said. "It was not until Noel Sickles . . . worked out a means of delivering illustration-quality pictures on a seven day basis, was I able to buck some of the chains of the working schedule while dramatically improving the all-over value of Terry."

It's obvious, when looking over the dailies and Sundays of 1935 and onward, that besides giving advice and inspiration, the gifted Sickles was now and then doing some of the pencilling and inking. Caniff used the pen less and less, switching to the brush and the liberal use of black ink. He gave much more attention to the staging of his events and, like Sickles, made use of motion picture approaches.

What he discovered for himself had already been done in the movies 20 years earlier. Caniff moved his camera, liberated the point of view. He introduced long shots, close-ups, boom shots. And his overall curiosity seemed to increase. What did a train look like from 100 feet directly above it? What was the difference between the light of early morning and that of mid-day?

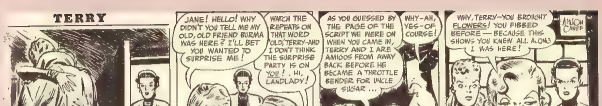
By the end of 1935, Caniff had mastered the impressionist technique, there was little he couldn't draw. But there were now plots he could no longer use. A villain like the Skull was okay for the old cartoon approach, maybe even an Oriental who said, "Amelican." With the sophisticated illustrative style, though, the moustache-twirling sequences didn't fit.

So, Caniff was obliged to bring his stories up to match the quality of his drawing. He turned to the movies for inspiration, this time borrowing from the A-features being turned out by MGM, Paramount and Warners. There were some very good people making movies in the '30s, people whose tricks Caniff could adapt to his purposes. Directors such as Josef von Sternberg, whose 1932 *Shanghai Express*, with Marlene Dietrich, and Warner Oland could have been storyboarded by Caniff. Tay Garnett, whose 1935 *China Seas* has Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, ships and piracy as well as the mix of action and comedy that became a Terry trademark. And Alfred Hitchcock was as interested in chases, bright dialogue and extended suspense as Caniff himself.

Actors, too, were important. The huge mute Big Stoop was a caricature of the Karloff monster. The Dragon Lady could have been played by the Dietrich of the von Sternberg epics, Sandhurst, the recurrent weakling villain, was based on Charles Laughton. Burma, who came along in 1936, was Caniff's version of the wise brassy blonde that Carole Lombard was famous for portraying. Burma owes something, too, to the Joan Crawford version of *Rain*. In the 1932 film, Sadie Thompson spends a good many of her rainy afternoons in her room listening to the "St. Louis Blues" on her windup phonograph. This song was also Burma's favorite, always heard before the blonde reappeared. When I once asked Caniff if he remembered seeing the movie, he answered, "I stole the whole character from Sadie Thompson."

Caniff had a good deal of fun in the middle '30s living up to the Pirates part of his strip's title. He worked every sort of pirate into his stories, from the suave sea-going Captain Judas to the blustering land pirate and smuggler Captain Blaze. Burma herself, as a result of having been Judas' mistress, is wanted for piracy by the British police in Hong Kong. This kept her moving in and out of the strip.

Taking a lesson from Noel Sickles, Caniff began using a lot of black ink for dramatic impact.



One key element of the trip was the constant romancing among the supporting cast.

Caniff has frequently used the word "picaresque" in describing his work. Terry certainly ran along the lines of a picaresque novel, of the kind Henry Fielding and Charles Dickens did. Pat and Terry are always on the move, on the road. The major villains and secondary characters are continually reappearing, many times in new guises. He also worked in an unrequited love theme by having Pat fall in love with Normandie Drake during the strip's second year. They are kept apart by the girl's relatives and she later marries the cowardly Sandhurst. Normandie was thereafter woven in and out of the story for the next several years, as was her miserable husband.

By having Terry go through adolescence and into manhood, Caniff provided himself with a wider range of story possibilities. Terry's first big romance was with his teenage contemporary April Kane. He later had a crush on Burma and eventually romanced the formidable Dragon Lady.

Caniff used sexual motivations more than any of his contemporaries. And because the comics, like the movies then, couldn't be too explicit, he made circumspection into a virtue and built up tension by suggesting rather than showing. Along the way he dealt with some unusual, for comics anyway, types. Among them the lesbian Sanjak, whose interest in young April Kane is used to move the story, and the nymphomaniac Cheery Blaze, whose failure with Pat Ryan prompts her to betray him.

Caniff was also good with bitchy women. He introduced Nastalthia Smythe-Heatherstone in 1936. She was a child then, a sort of midget Bette Davis. Nastalthia reappears years later, fully grown and as nasty as ever.

It was in the use of these characters, and all the sundry males, that Caniff excelled. His college theater experience and his love of movies made him aware of the value of the second leads and the minor characters. Pat Ryan could have changed places with Scorchy Smith, but there was never anyone in Sickles' strip like Judas, Big Stoop, Klang, April and the others. Sickles had perfected a strip which was a joy to look at. Caniff made you care about the people he was drawing.

His dedication to authenticity got Caniff into the war against Japan several years ahead of anyone else in the United States. The China he was portraying in Terry was much closer to the real China in late 1930's than it had been when little knickered Terry had arrived with his treasure map clutched in his hand. In the real China, they had been fighting a Japanese invasion army since 1937, and by 1939, there were one million Japanese troops in China. Caniff felt he had to show some of what was going on in his adopted country. He started mentioning the invaders in spring of 1938, by having the Dragon Lady recruit A guerrilla army to fight against them. Soon, invader planes were appearing in the sky, battlefields became part of the scenery. Caniff backed off from the war for some

Right: Terry's second adventure.

months and finished up the year with a story set in what was then French Indochina.

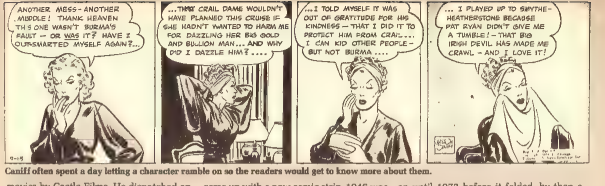
He couldn't ignore the war in China for long, and from the end of 1939 onward, the stories were almost all concerned with the invaders. Caniff told me his introduction of the Japanese into his strip caused one of the few conflicts he ever had with his syndicate, the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate. As an active supporter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Caniff was considerably to the left of his bosses. This never caused any trouble until Japanese soldiers showed up in *Terry*. It was suggested to Caniff that such unpleasant elements as war did not properly belong in a comic strip. Caniff disagreed and kept doing what he was doing. Pearl Harbor came along and he got no further complaints.

Although Caniff did some of his most ambitious work during the Second World War, there are critics and historians who contend something went out of *Terry* in the early 1940s. This is true, since Caniff had always worked hard to reflect his times and the '40s were not the '30s. Terry Lee moved from boyhood to manhood in those years, the strip became somewhat grimmer and less melodramatic.

Caniff showed a certain respect for most of the officers he depicted, but his real sympathy was with the enlisted men, the "dogfaces." Always a stickler for authenticity, he became even more concerned with getting every detail and prop just right. A *New Yorker* profile in 1943 gave some examples of the lengths to which Caniff would go to make sure *Terry* looked and sounded exactly correct. "In preparing a recent sequence in which Pat Ryan was involved in a large scale amphibious operation, Caniff felt obliged to read or at least consult 38 books. He found in his library many of the references he wanted, such as Jane's *Fighting Ships* and Lovett's *Naval Customs, Traditions and Usage*, but he had to buy 17 other books...

"The climax of this series began when Japanese medium bombers took off from an aircraft carrier to bomb an American installation. This presented a serious problem. Do medium bombers, after leaving a carrier, turn to the right or to the left? Caniff thought they would turn to the left, as they do when they take off from the ground, but he wasn't sure, and there was no answer to the question in military or aircraft manuals because the only medium bombers that ever took off from a carrier were the Doolittle raiders that bombed Tokyo. Caniff learned that Army Signals Corps photographers aboard the carrier had filmed the takeoff and that prints of the pictures had been put out as home

Terry joined the air force during the war and continued with fast-paced tales.



Caniff often spent a day letting a character ramble on so the readers would get to know more about them.

movies by Castle Films. He dispatched an assistant to the city to buy the reel, and when he ran it off in his studio, he saw that the bombers turned to the left, as he had thought all along.

The wartime action of the strip was limited to the China-Burma-India theater, which still gave Caniff quite a bit of territory to work in. He separated his two protagonists, putting Pat Ryan into the Navy as a lieutenant and letting Terry join the Air Force. The continuities shifted from Pat's adventures to Terry's and part of the fascination of following the strip then was in seeing the ingenious ways Caniff contrived to have their paths cross. It was in the war years that Caniff introduced some of his most successful and memorable characters. Air Force Colonel Flip Corkin, based on Caniff's longtime friend Colonel Phil Cochran, became Terry's new mentor. A hardboiled but humorous man, Corkin helped Terry through the transition from boy to man.

One of the best remembered characters didn't pop up until 1944. Once he did, he came close to stealing the strip. His real name was Charles C. Charles and he hailed from Boston. He was small, freckled, redheaded, wisecracking, brash and vocally lecherous. Everybody called him Hotshot Charlie, and he and Terry, even though they sometimes competed for the same girl, became fast friends.

By the war's end, Caniff already knew he was going to be giving up his characters. Marshall Field and the Chicago Sun Syndicate had offered him a much better deal than he was getting on *Terry and the Pirates*. All he had to do was come up with a new comic strip. 1946 was Caniff's last year on Terry and it contains some of his best work. Terry Lee, though still connected with the Air Force, is posing as a mercenary pilot and flying for a showstring airline called Air Cathay. Hotshot is his co-pilot.

Like the final chapter of a Victorian picaresque, the last months of *Terry* brought back all sorts of scattered characters. The Dragon Lady, Burma, Captain Blaze and nurse Jane Allen all show up again. Like the last scenes of a movie, Caniff ended with pictures and no dialogue. The final Sunday shows Terry saying goodbye to Jane at a snow-covered airfield. She starts for the plane, runs back to him, there is a clinch, then she's on the plane and flying away into the fading day. Terry turns away from us toward his waiting jeep, passing a New Year's party poster. It says, "Ring out the old, ring in the new."

The new for Caniff, of course, was *Steve Canyon*. The strip began life on January 13, 1947, with an impressive list of several hundred client papers. The new for the unfortunate Terry and company was George Wunder. Like Caniff, he was a graduate of the Associated Press art bullpen and that was about all he had in common with his predecessor. He was simply not the man for the job, either as artist or writer. The first few months of his *Terry* were passable and then things began to slide. Wunder had an apparent fixation with ears, big ears, and every single character in his version, male or female, eventually sprouted an enormous pair. Despite all this, the Wunder version managed to hold on until 1973 before it folded, by then a conservative, jingoistic shadow of what it once had been.

Twenty-seven years after he stopped drawing *Terry and the Pirates*, Milton Caniff was still thinking about it. "In the middle 1940s, when I made a deal to do a new strip for Marshall Field, I had plenty of time to become used to the fact I would be giving up all the *Terry* characters. It was not unlike a parent knowing that his children were no longer legally his and that he must relinquish them by court order," he wrote in an obituary for the strip.

"When I heard that *Terry* would be discontinued as of February 1973, I experienced the sensation of a parent learning his long-gone, but alive, children were sentenced to be executed." Caniff went on to talk about the people in the strip, characters who were nearly as real to him as the children he might have had. "I sometimes think about the plans I had noodled around with and wonder how they would have played out in print. I planned to have Pat Ryan marry Burma. That would have been a *Taming of the Shrew* at jet speed.... There was never a Stateside story in my *Terry*. I was going to make a big thing of all those China hands returning to the U.S. and showing how the picaresque hero from the *Far Places* does not always fare so well in the conventional surroundings back home." Characteristically, Caniff, not wanting to sound too sentimental or artistic, concluded the obit by saying the real purpose of *Terry and the Pirates* had been "to force the customer to buy tomorrow's paper." ■

Not all the war stories involved great danger as seen here.

Creating the Comics
Part Five: Editing

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

Comic book editors are much like movie producers: they take all the various elements, put them together and produce a finished product, on budget and on time. Each editor has his or her own personal style and point of view which may or many not be recognizable to the reader.

In the early days of comics, editors were too busy getting the books out to worry about style but as the years wore on, many began to put a distinctive imprint on their work. Most noticeable, editors at DC such as Mort Weisinger, Julius Schwartz, Jack Schiff and Robert Kanigher made their books distinctive. A reader began noticing a book's style long before recognizing the uncredited writers' or artists' styles. In the early 1960s, Stan Lee introduced a style all his own and the Marvel age of comics began in earnest.

Marvel's line has, until recently, been controlled by one editor-in-chief while DC's books have always been split up among a handful of people. Now both companies employ editorial staffs numbering just below 30, including assistants.

Just as there are respected writers and artists, a small number of editors have universal respect among the fans, and more importantly, among their peers. Archie Goodwin, Dick Giordano and Julie Schwartz are the names you hear most frequently these days.

Schwartz has been editing comics since the '40s and, at 67, is truly DC's Senior Editor and chief custodian of their premiere character, Superman. He edits *Superman, Action Comics, DC Comics Presents, New Adventures of Superboy* and *The Daring New Adventures of Supergirl*. He has edited just about every major character at DC and was instrumental in bringing about the Silver Age of comics with the revivals of Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkman and the Atom.

Schwartz prefers to bring original ideas to everything he touches. In fact, a sign hangs on his wall crying, "Be Original." When he was assigned the Batman books back in 1964, Schwartz immediately set about giving the books a new look. The first noticeable changes were putting the yellow elipse around the Bat-emblem on his chest, a more modern Batmobile, and elevator to the Bat Cave, the Hot Line and the death of Alfred. "I thought it would be nice to have a woman in the house so I introduced Aunt Harriet," Schwartz recalls. But soon after, William Dozier brought Batman to TV and wanted Alfred so the character had to be revived and Aunt Harriet soon disappeared.

Schwartz then became the Superman editor in the early '70s and brought Clark Kent and friends up-to-date. The *Daily Planet* was bought up by Galaxy Communications and Clark found himself switching from print to electronic media. "I felt that most kids didn't read newspapers except for the sports results. They don't read editorials or look at bylines. If they want to be informed, they watch television. This gave me a chance to do different things," Schwartz says. But again, the movie forced Clark back to the Planet and he now splits his duties between the typewriter and the microphone.

To also bring about change, Schwartz took a gamble and made Kent wear up-to-date clothes. "The switch was not well-received and discarded but at least I tried," he says proudly. "If I always succeeded it would be a miracle, if I always failed it'd be a tragedy.

"My job is to ask what are we going to do now that hasn't been done in the past. What original touches can we innovate? Does an established book need a new writer, a new artist, a new direction?"

On the other hand, Len Wein feels his main role as editor is to bring together the best possible talents for a series and let them work together. "It's to pick the people he or she feels best represents the book, and essentially sit back and let them do

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what they do best. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' If the book is going right, leave it alone."

Wein has done just about every phase of comic production with the exception of lettering. He entered the field as an artist and did pencilling and inking before quickly switching to writing. From there he did some production department work and even some coloring. After rising to prominence at DC, he left for Marvel and eventually became their Editor-in-Chief for a year. Then after being a writer/editor for a while, he left to edit for DC. Currently, he is editing the largest number of DC titles, aided by Nick Cuti, and his line-up is a collection of colorful comics: *Batman, Detective Comics, Batman and the Outsiders, Camelot 3000, Justice League of America*, the *Green Arrow* mini-series, *Saga of the Swamp Thing, New Teen Titans, She Devil* and assorted annuals and special projects.

"Doing any one thing would make me crazy," Wein admits. "I could not do what Julie does. I respect him tremendously for his ability to sit there and edit nothing but Superman material forever. How many different points of view can you bring to the same character? At least having this kind of range of characters, I can bring a range of points of view."

Still, Wein hopes one day to have a recognizable style, similar to Schwartz's. "I would like to think I am developing—I certainly don't think I've done this long enough to have fully developed a Len Wein look. I want there to be a feeling that when you pick up something I edited, you could tell it was me."

As each editor works on his slate of books, he must be concerned with many factors. Wein and Schwartz have both been faced with the problem of not having enough talent available to make changes when they felt such moves were necessary or outside licensing deals have forced them to add or delete parts of the characters' mythos. There are the numerous editorial conferences, usually with President and Publisher Jenette Kahn, and frequent strategy meetings with V.P.-Executive Editor Dick Giordano.

But it's the one-on-one meetings with the writers and artists that give each editor the greatest pleasures. "I love to start with nothing," Schwartz explains. "It's like a crossword puzzle with a lot of blank squares that you have to fill in. I consider myself a plot man. That's how I got my job, when Shelly Mayer hired me back in '44.

"A Cary Bates is handled differently than a Marv Wolfman or Bob Rozakis or Paul Kupperberg or Gardner Fox or John Broome. To go back to Gardner Fox, he would come in with a typewritten sheet of what the next Justice League would be about. I would read it and even if there was nothing in it I'd find a line, or thought, or even a word that would appeal to me and I'd say, 'Let's begin with this—and build.'

"I personally prefer working with narrative hooks—which is simply something that is so appealing or intriguing or mystifying to the reader, that he has to keep reading to find out what's going to happen. If I gave out that narrative hook, to different writers, they'd solve it in different ways."

Schwartz says that if he couldn't plot with the writer, he'd be an unhappy and unsatisfied editor. "I don't want a writer to come in with a finished plot without leaving any input from me. All too often I would say to Cary, 'How is the hero going to work out of his dilemma?' He says, 'I'll solve it when I get to it—and surprise you.' I'll say, 'I don't want you spending two hours or two days working this out, let's do it now.'

"The best example I can give is when I did a story with John Broome about an 'Escape Artist of Space.' The guy was like Batman, he would escape from any trap, except there was one trap he was put in that John Broome and I couldn't figure out a way for him to escape. We actually spent two weeks figuring out a way—when I say two weeks, I don't mean eight hours a day but every time we spoke to each other we'd ask each other, 'You figure it out yet?' "

Wein likes to sit down with the more established writers and work out the long range plans first. "The battle plans will

Other Viewpoints

We sent out a call for other editors and assistant editors at both DC and Marvel to tell us what makes their line-up of books special. Here are some of the responses from three very different individuals.

Murray Boltinoff
Editor, G.I. Combat

"What does an editor bring to the production of a comic?" you ask.

Everything, from the inception of an idea, often the idea itself, through the editing or supervision of the completed script, checking the artist's pencils, checking the inked pages, finally proofreading the entire job before it goes to the Comics Code Authority for approval, and then the engraver's. Lest we forget the cover. It's his responsibility to concoct the idea, and follow through with the entire job. And lest we forget another chore: checking the silver prints for proper coloring, and thumbing through the dummy to see that the pages are in sequence.

The foregoing is a step by step breakdown of and editor's job. In the meantime, he peruses letters from readers, attempts to reply to every one of them, attends editorial and sales conferences, and is constantly thinking of new ideas: stories, covers, whom to assign to what, how to improve his magazines. No 9-to-5 job for him but one that calls for inspiration and enthusiasm, virtually 'round the clock.

The above has been manifest in titles I formerly edited: *World's Finest, Legion of Super-Heroes, Superboy, Brave and Bold, Action, Ghosts* (which I initiated and edited), *House of Mystery, House of Secrets, Unexpected, The Witching Hour, Sugar and Spike, G.I. Combat*, etc. ad infinitum. For personal reasons, *G.I. Combat* is the sole survivor of my army of logos.

Now, hopefully, you know what an editor brings to the production of a comic.

Nick Cuti
Assistant Editor

My editorial duties at DC Comics consist of assisting the Senior Editor, Len Wein, and editing the digests—*Best of DC* and *Adventure*. Since the digests are all reprint material, my job entails mostly doing research in the DC library for stories and then thumbing through the film catalog to see if we have the material on film.

Stats are made from my choices of stories and I edit the stats—correcting errors not caught the first time, resizing the art on pages which once contained ads (there are no ads in the digests except for an occasional "in-house ad") and general cleaning-up of the art—and turn them into the Production Department where the corrections are made and the colorist's prints are made.

I then call in a cover artist and we toss ideas for a cover back and forth based on the interior material. When we both like an idea the artist will make a sketch for the approval of the Cover Editor, Len Wein, and then pencil the cover. I will write the cover copy based on the space provided by the cover layout and depending on what material we think will convince the readers to buy the book.

By this time the colorist/colorists will have brought in their color schemes for my approval. I may suggest changes and corrections and then turn in the color schemes to Production.

After that it's only a matter of checking final stats, 3M's, brown lines, and make-readies and then have a heart attack because the printer mixed-up covers 3 and 4 (the inside covers).

The most creative part of my job, besides working with the cover artist, is coming up with themes for the digests—such as the "Superman vs. Kryptonite" issue—and then digging out the stories which fall into that theme.

Ernie Colon
Editor, Wonder Woman, Arion, Blackhawk, Green Lantern

If anything goes wrong with the book you edit, it's your responsibility—period. And that's only fair. If you want to wear the 'suit of lights,' you got to fight the bull.

If, however, everything goes right with your book, you then become the invisible man. And that's only right. I don't really care that Sylvester Gavone went through hell to make his part realer than real. I just want to enjoy the movie.

The book is everything. Not their egos, or mine, or our personal problems—the book... and the reader. Got to listen to them, got to talk to them. I read their mail. I print letters and I answer a lot of mail personally—that is, apart from the lettercol. I'm flexible. I take advice and I still make mistakes that are head slappers.

I love it. All of it.

establish, that over the next year, these things will happen in the book. These characters will change essentially these ways. Then, unless the writers have a problem, I don't discuss it with them until I get a finished plot. When I'm working with a Gerry Conway or Marv Wolfman, I don't see what they are doing until I get a full plot.

"With other writers, it's exactly the opposite and we sit down and put together a story from nothing. Then, I want to see page breakdowns to make sure the story is paced well and then I want to see the actual script."

Wein, having had an art background, can tell exactly when an artist is making errors with anatomy or storytelling. For Schwartz, he goes on the instinctual level, claiming, "I know nothing about artwork. I know darn well the average reader knows nothing about artwork. If a shoulder is misplaced or a leg is slightly out of whack or the head is not eight or nine times the body, it doesn't bother me. If it looks wrong, it has to be changed. If I don't understand the art, I'll ask the artist to make a change.

"Mike Grell, for example, there are some things he can't do right with an oncoming shot, the head is always wrong on the body, who cares? Every time Carmine Infantino draws the Flash running backwards, he's always running on his heels, but no one complained."

After establishing working relationships with the creative members of the team, the editors both agree meeting the deadlines is the biggest problem. Schwartz has his own notebook trafficking system to make sure the work is done on time while Wein uses a master-plan on his wall, coloring in each completed segment. "Somehow," Wein laughs, "all the books are out at the end of the month. As long as we keep doing that, I'm doing it right. The month that stops happening and all the books don't come out, then I'm in terrible trouble."

Schwartz points to freelance writers and artists missing deadlines as his biggest problem. He tells the story of the worst deadline keeper of them all: Batman co-creator Bill Finger: "On occasion, he'd bring the script in, and ask for the check. I'd cautiously look through it and find a page one and a last page—with everything else blank. I had him sign this: 'I, William Finger, agree not to ask nor receive a check from Julius Schwartz unless that story has been delivered to Julius Schwartz and deemed acceptable by him.' After Finger signed it, in 1964, it was witnessed by Robert Kanigher.

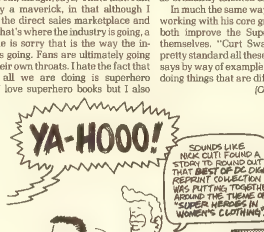
Schwartz says he likes changing his style as the marketplace continues to grow and evolve. He feels it makes him stretch and think in different ways and keeps him fresh. Wein, though, says, "I hate that. I am probably a maverick, in that although I respect the direct sales marketplace and realize that's where the industry is going, a lot of me is sorry that is the way the industry is going. Fans are ultimately going to cut their own throats. I hate the fact that rapidly all we are doing is superhero books. I love superhero books but I also love westerns and a good mystery book." If the fans and distributors don't start thinking in new ways, all that will be produced, Wein contends, will be superheroes and the diversity once seen on the racks will be gone, possibly forever.

After deadlines, the greatest challenges Wein sees in the job are all creative. "My biggest challenge is to broaden the types of material we do. I am desperately trying to find new ways for us to do mystery books that will appeal to the direct market or do westerns. I would hate to see those die.

"Also, taking an artist, Don Heck comes to mind specifically, that the market no longer perceives as talented and who I know is talented and changing that opinion of the artist. Don is a wonderfully talented artist but because of one off-handed stupid comment that one writer said in one fanzine, his career was almost ruined. Getting him to produce the level of work he is capable of, after having been slapped in the face, is the challenge. I like watching the market come around to say 'Gee, Don's a heck of an artist. Boy, how come we didn't notice—what happened to him?' Nothing's happened to him. Their perceptions have changed again, that's all. He's as brilliantly talented as he ever was."

In much the same way, Schwartz is now working with his core group of creators to both improve the Superman books and themselves. "Curt Swan, who has been pretty standard all these years," Schwartz says by way of example, "all of a sudden is doing things that are different. Things like

(Continued on page 64)



From Skataris to Sable

A chat with storyteller Mike Grell

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

Mike Grell looks nothing like one would imagine. Instead of a tall, broad-shouldered, bearded adventurer, Grell is actually like you or me—average. His beard is not as stylized as Travis Morgan's or Green Arrow's, his build is less-than-superheroic but he has the swashbuckler's spirit which is part of all he draws.

A friendly, talkative fellow, Grell is embarking on a new phase of his career, closing a few doors behind him on the way. February saw the premiere of *Jon Sable, Freelance*, First Comics' third entry into the market. Grell has also brought to First, *Starslayer*, taken away from Pacific Comics after its initial six-issue run. After scripting and laying out the first two new issues, Grell will leave the book behind, licensing it to First. With issue nine, Lenin Delsol and Mike Gustovich will be the full art team with a writer as-yet-undetermined.

Grell is also walking away from his first comic book creation, Travis Morgan, *The Warlord*. After seven years at DC Comics, Grell will be leaving *Warlord* with issue #72 and has no other assignments with his first comic book publisher. "It was time to cut the cord," Grell says of the move in December.

"I've told DC that I will be more than willing to work with anyone who picks it up from there and make sure the storyline proceeds in a proper direction. I am hoping to do a project with DC involving *Warlord* in the future. We'll jump ahead and actually tell the end of the story in an album or something of that nature. It's nothing more than in the talking stage. Dick Giordano and I discussed it very, very briefly in San Diego this past summer."

For the foreseeable future, Grell will be concentrating solely on *Sable*, a creation that was born "in a clap of thunder." The entire concept came together very quickly, he says, maybe taking six months. The storyline involves Jen Moses Sable, a freelance mercenary in high adventure stories that will take him around the world. What makes him unique, Grell adds, is that Sable has an alter-ego. For an hour or two a day, he assumes the persona of B.B. Flemm, America's most beloved children's author. With wig and mustache, Sable can be seen on talk shows, autograph parties and publishers' offices. No one is the wiser as to his true calling in life.

Grell usually used his covers for symbolic poses and images as seen by this collection of Warlord covers.

WARLORD ® & © 1983 DC COMICS INC.

Representing Flemm is a very modern woman named Eden Kendall. "There is a hint of a romantic involvement there. It's very casual and we'll occasionally see them in the sack," Grell comments. "Where Kendall and Sable have a relationship that is both friendly and professional, the illustrator of his books, Myke Blackmon and Sable get off on the wrong foot. There's a mild animosity between the two of them; Blackmon doesn't get along with Flemm at all. She's a six-foot-tall woman who is in her early 20s, a terrific artist in her own right."

While Sable's Flemm has some interesting women in his life, the mercenary has a very strong antagonist in the form of Josh Winters, a black police captain who detests vigilantes like Sable. "Sable operates, more or less on the outer fringes of the law. What I always liked about the Green Arrow character was that he stayed truer to the spirit of justice rather than the letter of the law. Sable is like that, too, and Winters objects like hell to all the good press Sable gets while the cops basically get a raw deal in the press. If something goes wrong, people come down on the cops and they never take into consideration all the times that police officers were there when needed," Grell says.

The final supporting character to be introduced is Sonny Pratt, former stuntman and fulltime swashbuckler-at-heart. He's "barely on the sunny side of 70. In fact, he may have pushed over the boundary. Sonny was Sable's fencing coach when he was training for the Olympic pentathlon. Pratt is also convinced that Douglas Fairbanks' parents brought home the wrong baby from the hospital. He has coached everybody who is everybody—fencing, fighting—but he has never taken the bows himself. He will be a sort of recurring companion, thorn-in-the-side. He wants to hang around Sable . . . a lot. He also plays a sort of Cato to Sable's Inspector Clouseau, in other words, he thinks nothing of swinging through the skylight during one of Sable's romantic interludes, forcing him to fight a duel before he goes away and leaves Sable alone.

This is a sample of Grell's approach to Tarzan from last summer.

"He has a certain amount of blackmail to use against Sable. Everyone knows Sable is a macho, action character. Very few people know that he is B.B. Flemm. He uses this ammunition to persuade Sable to do almost anything he wants."

Sable's first two chronicled adventures have been used to set up the storylines, introduce the characters and make the fans familiar with the setting. Issue three in April, will bring the first of a four-part origin story, hinted at only briefly in the first two issues.

IRON MIKE

Grell has been working steadily in the comics field for nearly 10 years now, after hearing how cartoonists worked only two or three days a week and made a million dollars a year. Originally, Grell wanted to be an architect but was never good enough at the math so he switched his interests to art. After high school, he managed to get in a year at the University of Wisconsin before "I got caught in the only lottery I ever won." Rather than be drafted, Grell joined the Air Force hoping to avoid Vietnam. Once in far east Asia, Grell discovered comics had changed since the early to mid-1960s. After one look at an issue of Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams' *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, Grell knew comics was the career for him.

He enrolled in the Famous Artists School and reflects, "I think it's one of the best courses available for a beginner. This thing teaches you to crawl before you walk and walk before you run." Once out of the Air Force, Grell attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts because it was the only school he knew that offered a degree in cartooning.

Although he was intrigued by the change in comic books, Grell remained interested in comic strips because of the potential for big bucks and the opportunity to delve deeper into characterization. During school, Grell had tried to market a strip called *Iron Mike* which featured a hard-boiled private eye. From there, he created *Savage Empire*, a tale of Atlantis which Grell calls, "An American in Atlantis."

Much to his surprise, the syndicates rejected *Savage Empire* out of hand. Most editors refused to look at a continuity strip since so many were failing and audiences, they thought, wanted only daily gag strips. Willard Coulson, a syndicate editor, told him, "Kid, if you were here 15 years ago, you would have it made." The next day, *Brenda Starr* artist Dale Messick told Coulson she was looking for an assistant. Coulson put Grell and Messick together.

"Working with Dale was really interesting," Grell recalls. "I learned how to adapt to something that was completely alien to me. Dale is very soft and feminine and draws in curves. I was all hard edges and cross-hatching. It took me quite some time before I found a way to duplicate her style. First, I drew exclusively with a brush and I waited until the last minute before deadline. I didn't have time to spend to get hard or do cross-hatching. I had to get it down and I found that the faster I worked, the more my stuff looked like Dale's. The only way I found to make our two styles jive was to work that way."

Grell would do backgrounds and ink the figures while John Olsen would do the lettering and finish the backgrounds. Messick finished the heads. Today Grell laughs and claims if he ever writes an autobiography, the title would be *Doing Brenda's Body*.

Doing his own comic strip still burned in Grell's soul so he headed for New York and attended a comics convention in hopes of meeting with talent scouts for the syndicates. When Grell turned up at Phil Seuling's annual bash, he was shocked to see no talent scouts, few pros and mostly fans. Wearing a suit, however, did make him stand out in a crowd.

Allan Asherman, then Joe Kubert's assistant at DC, showed Grell's work to people and Grell found himself talking to a man named Irv. He approached Grell, liked what he saw and suggested Grell go see Julius Schwartz at DC. What Grell later discovered was that the Irv he spoke with was Irv Novick, then chief *Batman* penciller.

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Beneath Sable's home is a target range with a sophisticated computer, left. From issue one, the introduction of Eden Kendall, agent and friend.

FIRST CAME AQUAMAN

"Julie was very cordial and treated me in his customary fashion," Grell says of the encounter. "'What the hell makes you think you can draw comics?' I unzipped my portfolio and said, 'You tell me.' We took me in to Joe Orlando and I walked out with 'As the Undersea City Sleeps,' an Aquaman story for *Adventure Comics*." The three-part story established Grell as both a penciller and inker, a rare commodity in the business these days.

As Grell was turning in his first story, Murray Boltinoff was pacing in his office wondering who he could get to replace Dave Cockrum, who had just announced he was leaving *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* to go work for Marvel, Orlando suggested Grell and Boltinoff had him ink a Cockrum story. Satisfied with the effort, Grell debuted as Legion artist with issue #201.

The Legion days were happy ones for Grell. "I was very ecstatic to have a series that fast," Grell says. "I started working with Cary Bates who is one of the top three writers in my esteem. Cary will give you all the details cinematically. One of his scripts resembles a film script—he'll tell you where to move the camera, what has to be in the shot.

"The future aspect was perfect for me but the 26 strange characters were awfully hard. The one thing that helped me was the background material that Dave Cockrum did. He had a sketchbook which DC xeroxed with all the costume details. There are some costumes in the Legion that I couldn't remember from page to page. Shrinking Violet, for example, has all this elaborate lacework on her costume that had to be just right."

Grell plowed along, even though comics fandom hadn't really discovered the joys of reading team-oriented comics back then. Grell even complains that some of the stories were just minor soap operas. When Bates left the series and was replaced by Jim Shooter, and then Paul Levitz, things began to change. "I felt like my mother had moved out and a strange lady had taken her place." Grell says. He adds that the collaborations didn't click and that his interest was beginning to wane. He never had the love for the Legion that Cockrum had. "I cared about it, but he took very, very great pains with the characters."

Before leaving the book, Grell created Dawnstar, an American Indian with wings who had the ability to track down anything, anywhere. Grell created the character and origin while Levitz contributed her powers. She has since become a popular Legionnaire, which pleases Grell since he always felt that the Legion wasn't racially integrated enough. "You can do any relationship you want," he says of the attitude in the mid -70s at DC, "as long as they're not black and white. I did one particular story where the character was rather undefined. I read it over and said, 'Why not? there must be a few surviving black people in the 30th Century.' I didn't know until several issues later that they were all moved out onto an island. So, I drew this Science Police officer as a black man and turned the comic in and Murray Boltinoff almost had apoplexy. 'You can't do that, this guy is black! You're going to have to change him.' Why? 'You can't do that because there's something negative in that character.' He was an ordinary man who could make mistakes; Murray felt that would make the character appear weak. I took the story back to ink and was angry enough to make it obvious that he was a black man colored pink.

"One of my pet peeves in comics is that most of the black characters are white people colored brown."

Along this time, as Grell was moving off the *Legion*, Denny O'Neil was given the go-ahead to revive the Green *Lantern* title. At the time, both Green Lantern and Green Arrow were sharing a back-up slot in *The Flash*. Jack Kirby was given the nod for artist when Grell approached and said, "'Who do you want killed?' I think what I

Left: The final issue of Starslayer for Pacific Comics. It returns soon under the First Comics aegis. Right: Grell, a natural-born storyteller, relaxes in San Diego.

really said was, 'Oh please, oh please, oh please.' He said OK. I enjoyed it tremendously working with Denny O'Neil. He's another of the best writers working in comics."

During all of this, Grell still had hopes of selling *Savage Empire* as a strip. Finally, he decided to turn it into a comic book and approached then-president Carmine Infantino who said, "Show it to Joe; if he likes it, we'll buy it." Grell did up a proposal and spent a day at Joe Orlando's upstate New York home. "He quizzed me for hours of what the characters were like, what Morgan did, why he did it, what was it like being an Air Force flyer, and at the end of the day, Joe knew the character almost as well as I did," Grell says.

The character was bought and Grell wrote and illustrated the opening Warlord tale which appeared in *First Issue Special* #3 in 1975. *Warlord* was the only feature to appear in this oddly-named showcase title that won its own series, which premiered a mere two months later.

Orlando continued to work with Grell on the character as the first of many editors on the title. "He was a lot of fun to work with," Grell remembers fondly. "He never let me get away with anything. When I delivered the artwork, he would go over it and critique it. If I got something wrong, not only did he correct it, but he gave me an art lesson. This was really the fabulous part of working with him."

As writer/artist, Grell approached the book with a different point of view than most comics. *Warlord* has always been a faster-to-read comic than most others with a pace that could leave a reader breathless. In the last two years, the series had concentrated much more on the characters and the boundaries of human relationships. These aspects gave *Warlord* a unique, quiet strength that has made it a particularly strong title on the newsstands and has recently inspired a Warlord toy.

"As a writer," Grell says, "I was trying to have fun. I was looking for something that would be 20-30 minutes of cheap thrills. I think comic books, with a few exceptions, are there to entertain. I did things like moving my character around the countryside; I never drew a map so I could move him from one side of Skataris to the other just for the sake of the story. I am firmly a member of the Mickey Spillane school of storytelling. Write the end first and then write your way up to it so you don't find any surprises. When I did *Warlord*, I planned it on a page by page outline and made sure I knew when I was going and the action was moving along at the right pace."

Travis Morgan's adventures in the inner world of Skataris has brought him in touch with the remnants of a past civilization, perhaps Atlantis, and with many different societies. He has the wanderlust in his blood and is never home long with his wife, Tara, queen of her people. The stories Warlord was involved with were unusual and more often than not, unexpected.

What did cause some confusion two or three years ago was the time sense in Skataris. A production error was exacerbated by then-editor Jack C. Harris and has remained a question in the readers' minds ever since. Grell warms up to the question, seizing the opportunity to set the record straight, perhaps as a final act. "I did a story where Mariah comes down to Skataris from the outer world and she's having trouble adjusting to the fact that things don't work there the same way as they work here. Due to an editorial error or a lettering error that no one caught, one of my lines was messed up and the explanation was almost completely wrong. The line said that while Mariah was relaxing in

(Continued on page 55)

Sable meets the President, left, and stalks his would-be assassin in his first adventure.

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Dave & Deni Sim Part Two

Join us for more merriment with "The Man Who Would Be Dangerfield" and "His Wife Who Might Be Shirley Temple" as they discuss and dismember comics' funny animal barbarian, Cerebus the Aardvark.

By DAVID McDONNELL

Baltimore can be a very funny place when you're talking about aardvarks.

Especially when you're closeted in a motel room late at night with a steaming pot of coffee and Dave and Deni Sim, creator and publisher respectively, of one of today's most innovative, successful alternative comic series, *Cerebus the Aardvark*.

Last issue, in the opening salvo of this two-part interview, Dave and Deni discussed the origins of their short, gray-furred barbarian and dissected their own relationship as creator/publisher and husband/wife. They also cracked jokes, did impressions, and disclosed some startling facts—for example, Dave Sim wears light blue socks "with holes." (And you heard it here first!)

Expect yet another fascinating clothing revelation this issue as the Sims chat about publishing ventures, color portfolios, and animated films—and crack jokes and do impressions. They'll also talk about their character's life after death, what happens following the apparently-inevitable "Death of Cerebus" in issue #300, some 20 years from now. But first, conversation resumes regarding fans and great expectations.

COMICS SCENE: You once noted, "Every time Cerebus looked like it would take off and become a major comics title, something would happen."

DAVE SIM: Much of that was cash flow. And because of a printer screw-up, *Cerebus* #23 was delayed a month and we lost our momentum. Comic fans went, "Oh, it must be dead. It was nice while it lasted." There's a set pattern to what fans want. They want the book out on time with you drawing the character whom they love and an identifiable but not predictable tale. The story has to go off in enough of a new direction to astound them as much as the previous one did. Fans aren't really happy with anything else.

DENI SIM: They're intelligent people. Fans know what they like; you can't fool them. Print crap and they won't buy it. You have to convince them with every issue. You can't just say the new *Cerebus* is out and Dave Sim drew it. After each issue, you must get a majority decision—in the form of letters and sales—from the fans saying, "Yes, we're still happy with this book."

CS: After five years, to paraphrase Gil Kane, have you been "worn to a nub" being a comics creator and pleasing those fans' great expectations?

DAVE: This business does wear you out when you're dealing with editors and publishers. In my case, I avoid all that stuff. I don't let the business make me crazy. I did three years ago when I was bound and determined to be a superstar, vowing that "*Cerebus* must take off at issue #15 or somebody will pay the price!" And that somebody ended up being me. You can't do that forever. Why walk into a comics shop and throw a tantrum because only 200 people—instead of 400—showed up to see you? At least, there are 200 fans waiting. And it's nice that so many professionals like *Cerebus*. If you get a fan letter from Alex Toth, that counts for something far beyond simple ego gratification.

CS: Must be that gray aardvark suit.

DENI: He does have a dark, little vest like Cerebus does. But Dave really looks like someone who doesn't want to stop and chat with anyone.

CS: Like creator, like aardvark. Certain characters, like Lord Julius—who is derived from the Groucho Marx persona—are easier for you to write than others. Why?

DAVE: If you have the voice down, you can't write a bad Rodney Dangerfield. His rapid-fire delivery just naturally works. It's the same with Lord Julius. I like Steve Gerber's work a great deal, but when he used Groucho as a cab driver in *Giant-Size Master of Kung Fu*, it didn't quite make it. The lines were delivered the way Groucho would say them, but they weren't funny. To a degree, I can get away with Elrod [Sim's parody of Michael Moorcock's Elric of Melnibone character imbued with a Fogharn Loghorn personality] not saying something funny. Fogharn Loghorn could be funny or not, but he *always* said things in the same pattern. I perform it myself when I'm writing, reading it aloud.

DENI: The weekend Dave wrote the Rodney Dangerfield character [*Cerebus* #42], it was Rodney Dangerfield for three days.

DAVE: [As Dangerfield] Let me tell you, it was a rough weekend.

CS: Rough?

DAVE: Yeah, rough. Really rough. So rough I was doing Dangerfield in the shower and getting him all wet.

CS: Wet?

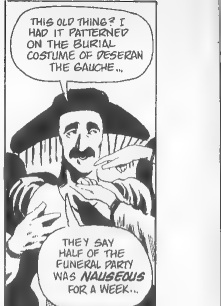
DAVE: Really wet. [as himself] The problem was that you can't really write Dangerfield on the sly because he doesn't do it, either. You have to write his dialogue so you can spiel it off the way he does and never miss a beat, hitting each word. That's when it devastates you. I wrote the first line, read it, then wrote the line answering it back and tried to develop the special rhythm of his delivery.

CS: Other writers often actually become a character in their own heads. Is that what you do?

DAVE: [As Dangerfield] No, I don't think so. I can't see that at all. But let me tell you, it's rough. Really rough. [as himself] I think you have to write characters with whom you're comfortable and I love doing Dangerfield.

CS: No kidding. Certain authors build characters by preparing detailed personality charts and biographies for them. But you actually become the character, don't you?

DAVE: Yes. There's no life to it for me otherwise. You may have the right words because you know the characters and their backgrounds, but you lack the feeling. When I hear comic writers describing their characters' backgrounds—this kind of parents, these kind of experiences—I can understand it, but my question is how do you get the readers involved in all that? I think you must become the person you're writing.



Lord Julius, Dave Sim's version of Groucho Marx, delivers a typical wisecrack in *Cerebus* #16.

CS: Are you a frustrated actor?

DAVE: Yes. I don't have the guts or the nerve to get up and do it in public with that morbid fear of missing the words. In comedy, if you hit the wrong word or say something wrong, the joke is blown. I can get it right and nail it down tight in print. And I can do enough of it in person to be entertaining at a convention, though much of that accomplishment is that fans are already sold on my being funny before they even meet me.

CS: Do they say, "Dave Sim!! Can I *touch* your shoe?"

DAVE: "Can I shake the hand of a genius?" I get that line a great deal. You say, "Hi," and they convulse. "That's funny!" "Get me a cup of coffee." "Oh, he's so funny! I *love* it!" It's the old Robin Williams thing of "Now, you're laughing at *nothing*."

CS: Deni, what do you do when Dave comes home expecting some respect as Dangerfield? Are you joke?

DENI: I'd like to think that the female characters in *Cerebus*—although they are

not me and I want to make that clear—have a certain amount of me in them. To tell the truth, Astoria is astoundingly like Dave's mother. And Dave has said that if Astoria and the Regency Elf had a child, it would be me.

DAVE: Deni's half-way between those two characters. She can be on the phone, giving a distributor holy hell and then get off and say [as Shirley Temple] "Oooooohhhh! I bought new shoes today!" [laughter]

DENI: I'm easily pleased, but I'm also easily displeased. A lot of my Astoria-ness comes from protecting Dave. If anybody invades our turf, I lash out.

CS: Frank Oz of The Muppets says that he enjoys doing Miss Piggy because it enables him to display the feminine part of his personality.

DAVE: That's true of me as well. *Cerebus #36* was a very emotional issue. In it, Jaka, an incredibly vulnerable character who isn't-defending herself, gets trashed very badly. She just sits and takes it because that's all she can do. She feels this enormous love for Cerebus although he's being horrible to her, and can't get angry with him. There's a lot of discovery about yourself when you write stories like that one. In doing Cerebus, I discover the side of me which is a real jerk.

DENI: Dave is one of the most ardent feminists I know, as I am.

DAVE: The Alan Alda of Comicdom.

DENI: For sure! Dave has taught me more about learning to take care of myself as a woman than anyone else I've ever met, because he felt there were things which had to be pointed out to me. *Cerebus #36* was Dave taking a look at relationships and making a statement about them. As a woman looking at the issue, I thought the whole point was that Jaka could handle the relationship and its responsibilities while Cerebus couldn't. We have had more fan mail on that issue than any other. Women sent in postcards saying, "I loved it. It broke my heart."

DAVE: No one should look at the story and say, "The woman won." It's not a matter of winning. I got reactions from women—"Yes, I've been in that situation"—and from men who said, "Yes, how come conversations with women always turn out that way? Why do you end up saying something and suddenly, they start crying? You get tongue-tied and can't—I mean if it were another guy you were talking to . . . [as Henry Higgins, singing] Why can't a woman be more like a man??? [laughter]

CS: *Cerebus #36* featured a very adult comic story.

DAVE: I am trying to do a book for grown-ups. That's why I've toned down all the violence. It's about time that you can read a 20-page story and not have to go back and add up all the fight scenes: how many punches . . . how many shots of the hero leaping above the city . . . did we get our money's worth from that standpoint?

Supposedly, you can't draw a comic book with two people in a room talking for 20 pages. It's dull. It can't sell. We did it with *Cerebus #36*. Many grown-up readers out there are not being satisfied because there isn't much material you can look at and say there's more here than meets the eye. You can count the good examples on one hand: Will Eisner's *A Contract with God*, *Elfquest*, Art Speigelman.

CS: And Cerebus. Has our sardvarkian hero matured over these five years?

DAVE: Not in any meaningful sense. He has changed, but not for the better. He hasn't learned any great lessons.

DENI: If he had, issue #36 would have ended differently.

CS: But he hasn't lopped anyone's hand off lately, as he did in issue #1.

DAVE: Look at his motives. He isn't being violent, because it suits his purposes to be peaceful. There's no change in a moral sense, just the convenience of the moment.

DENI: He's more willing now to hold out for the long-term pay-out in bags of gold, which he used to be unwilling to do. Formerly, it was the immediate bag of gold.

CS: Sounds tricky. How does work begin on a typical issue of *Cerebus*?

DAVE: I have a notebook in which I keep ideas and plan the issue. I begin writing an issue by sitting down and actually drawing the issue number on the first page. Then, I write down whatever dialogue I have. If I planned for a sequence to take two pages, so much the better if I can compress it into just one. The economy of story becomes an important part of the action. I don't show Cerebus walking to the rear of the Regency Hotel, checking out a mallet—suddenly, he's in the garden, playing croquet. I'll tell Deni, "I've got page 10 written. And I didn't have to do it until next week."

DENI: Later, I'll ask him where he is and he'll say, "Page four." Because the rest of it got compressed together.

CS: You're churning butter; the cream rises to the top.

DAVE: Exactly, the humor comes out that way. You can't fake humor, but you can fake drama. A character can be walking around, crying with huge gobs of dialogue all over the place and you'll start feeling sorry for him but if he isn't being funny, you know. So, I cut back to where he stopped being funny and write something new. It isn't just pacing, but a density of humor.

CS: How do you divide the duties?

DAVE: I write four days each week, and then I draw for the remaining three days. I always do six pages each week, two pages per day. Every Monday, I go in with my six pages written, broken down into six or seven-panel situations and start drawing. After awhile, you develop an instinct for layout, adding and dropping things—this will be a close-up or an extreme close-up. Certain patterns begin to form, circles which unite all the panels or a line which goes down the page and becomes a shadow. I can't do it any other way except instinctively. I usually have the page all drawn with none of the word balloons worked in and perhaps, just a few quick movement lines to indicate a leaping motion. From there, I'll either tighten up the pencils or actually start laying in the lettering. Then, I letter the page in ink and go out for lunch or walk around the block. That's enough of a gap between pencilling and inking the art to switch my thought processes from composition to being more intimately involved with each element on the page.

CS: So, you complete a story about every three weeks?

DAVE: And then, I do the cover—which takes a whole day—and the letters page. I've got it down to three weeks. Now, about my color portfolio . . .

CS: In the meantime, what are you doing, Deni?

DENI: What Dave calls "putting out brushfires": making sure the previous issue shipped, that it didn't have any mistakes, paying the bills. And I take the book to the printer, which is about four hours away from us.

CS: All the fun stuff of being a publisher—and now you're now beginning to publish something other than *Cerebus*.

DENI: Yes. I'm doing two books. *Strange Brew* is a collection of stories by Michael T. Gilbert. He's a very gifted artist whose work I've liked since I first saw The Wraith in Star*Reach. About a year ago, I realized that I was getting a handle on publishing and thought about doing a regular anthology, *Unique Stories*. That fell through, but I had thought about Michael again. He's an extremely talented guy who knows how to get the best possible work out of the printer, the publisher and himself. The only reason that Michael hadn't been doing books before is he didn't have a publisher. Basically, what I'm trying to do is provide a service: I already have distributors, shippers, the package and everything else set up. All I need to do is take an artist who doesn't need an editor hovering over him, take his book, put it on the market and do my best to make it work. He gets a straight 75% of the profit so it's up to him to put together the best possible product. If it makes money, he makes more money and I

He looks like Rodney Dangerfield. . . He talks like Rodney Dangerfield. . . But he isn't Rodney Dangerfield. He's a character in *Cerebus #42* who doesn't get any respect, even though his vote is desperately needed. However, he is a lot like Dave Sim—and that's rough. Really rough.

COMING IN FANGORIA

MAKEUP EFFECTS SPECTACULAR!

It's back to basics this issue in FANGORIA #26 as we take another look at the horrific makeup effects that are such an attraction in recent terror epics. Leading the pack is the godfather of modern makeup effects himself, Dick Smith, who gives the lowdown on his work for the modernized vampire story *The Hunger*, directed by Tony Scott, brother of Ridley. John Caglione, one of Smith's most gifted protégés, talks about his entrance into the makeup field and his astounding effects created for *Amityville II: The Possession*. Also on hand are Bill Munns, in Part 2 of our in-depth interview in which he speaks about his makeup creations for *Savage Harvest*, *Dead and Buried* and *Beastmaster*; and 30-year-old "newcomer" Ed French who has practiced his makeup wizardry in such cult productions as *Smithereens* and *Geek Maggot Bingo*.

Flash!! Vincent Price, Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, and John Carradine are starring together for the first time! The four titans of terror are to be seen in the British production of *House of the Long Shadows* this spring. Get the behind-the-scenes story from screenwriter Michael Armstrong.

Horror and Rock unite! Johnny Legend tells all in "Shockability," an exploration of the roots of horror rock, from the amazing Screamin' Jay Hawkins, the man who started it all with his incredible stage act that popped out of a coffin, to the great John "Dinner With Drac" Zacherley, to Bobby Pickett's "Monster Mash", to—would you believe it?—Rod McKuen! Read it in FANGORIA #26.

On the wacko exploitation front, intrepid Fango freelancer Randy Palmer chronicles a weekend spent with the Wizard of Gore in "At Home With Herschell Gordon Lewis," and *Corpse Grinders* director Ted V. Mikels discusses his stupefying career.

PLUS: The luscious Tanya Roberts!! All this and more in FANGORIA #26! Can you afford to miss it?

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make money. *Strange Brew* was put out as an experiment and I already feel it's a success. If it sells well enough and we're both happy, we'll do more volumes. I'm also publishing Arn Saba's *Neil the Horse* in a 120-page collection to introduce him to more readers and a mini-series by Bill Loebs, *Journey*, about Wolverine MacAllistaire, a frontiersman in the early days of Michigan. Wolverine is a very feisty old gentleman who lives out in the wilderness with the Indians. It'll be out this spring. This is just the beginning.

DAVE: And if this was an actual interview we'd talk about color portfolios.

CS: You're no longer Barry Windsor-Smith, are you, Dave? That's how you started in *Cerebus #1*.

DAVE: I regret that I have only one artistic integrity to give to my medium. That's something quotable which doesn't make any sense. You can't copy *anyone* thoroughly enough to become as good as they are. I learned a lot from copying Barry Windsor-Smith as I learn a lot from Hal Foster, Al Williamson, Alex Toth, Will Eisner. In terms of artistic evolution, it's easier for me to develop by being in Kitchener, Ontario than in New York—where many guys carry the burden of other peoples' opinions about their work around in their head. They tend to modify their artistic style in order to please whoever is the most strident critical voice at the moment. Because I'm isolated I tend not to draw something because it'll impress somebody, but to draw something that I'll be totally happy with at day's end. And to me, what's most impressive is how the page looks when it's printed.

CS: Sometimes that means doing unusual things, such as the alternating appearance and disappearance of panel backgrounds in Cerebus #36.

DAVE: That's a conscious decision that a reader doesn't notice until he's a few pages into the story. There are pages you draw so that people can discover what you're doing. A great deal of what I did in issue #36 was to actually show people what 20 pages really are in a comic book if you don't change the location or bring out the tricks or do big caption blocks. It was almost to create an appreciation of what Frank Miller does, by taking 20 pages and by virtue of how he composes it, doing something that you think takes 20 minutes to read, but doesn't. Actually, it's only an eight or nine-minute read, but you've been to enough places, gone through enough changes, met enough characters and had enough transitions in that story so that you really feel as if you've been through something *different*. That's the trick. With Cerebus #36, I said, "I don't care. This conversation is worth it. It may only take three minutes to read the story, but it *will* be 20 pages. That's an extreme; the other extreme is *Cerebus* #43, the election night issue with 12 panels per page and the balloon wordage twice the average length. It takes *five* times as long to read. Now, about color portfolios . . .

CS: Deni's brother, Michael, originally helped to chart the *Cerebus* universe.

DENI: Michael is very interested in history, and he felt it was very important when Dave was creating *Cerebus* that he have something solid to work within, maps which told you where the cities were, some of its ancient history.

DAVE: Much of what he did became unacceptable. Michael recognized it before I did. For me, it was like going back to school and having to study this world he was creating. And after awhile, I failed. He wasn't particularly upset, but it just made it useless for him to continue to write it.

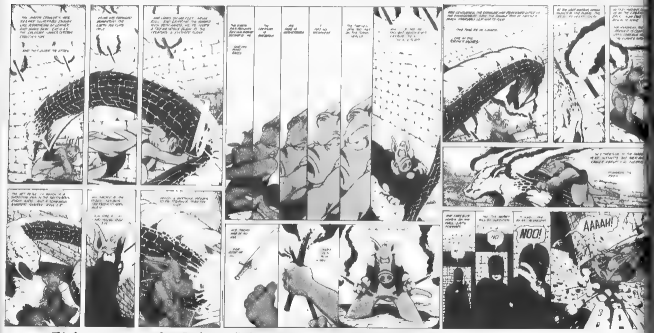
CS: Did he create concepts which are still in play in the series?

DAVE: He didn't so much create them as fulfill my demands, like "make up the religious factions which will be at war in Palmu." He would write a 20-page piece about them, why they were at odds, where they came from. And I picked up the material in a very cosmetic way, wherever I could add humor. I try to stay within the limits of which actually happened in order to make my stories more realistic. There's satisfaction in doing that for me. It becomes one of the reasons to do a 300-issue comic book—to portray an accurate evolution of the society.

CS: And how far does society evolve before Cerebus dies in issue #300?

DAVE: Not very far. I would not want it to because this is Cerebus' life. Our world is not going to evolve very far in my lifetime. I'm 26 and man has landed on the moon in my lifetime. Cerebus is 29-years-old. If we were both the same age and I drew the last panel 21 years from now when he died, I would have this horrible feeling that as soon as I finished that panel, I'd pitch over on the drawing board. Three years passed during the events from issue #1 to #25. At issue #26, we start at summer 1413, and go through to the end of that winter in issue #50. Then, we'll go back to single issues, what happened this or that month. It leaves times very open so if I want to do a Cerebus story in 30 years, I'll do it and slot in between issues #65 and #66—"You know, guys, I forgot to tell you this one."

CS: Just because the character will die



This three-page sequence from Cerebus #15 displays Dave Sim's dramatic storytelling abilities.

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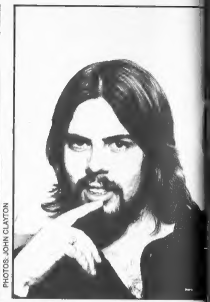
doesn't mean we won't see new stories about him sometime after his demise.
DAVE: Exactly. After the 300 issues are done, I see that as when I can take my Will Eisnerish reward and do stories of indeterminate length with new or old characters. I feel that you owe it to the fans to stay with the book and to say — with 21 years' advance notice — that he does die in Cerebus#300—but the fans owe it to you to let you out of that monthly bondage.
CS: What can we expect in the way of aardvarkian merchandising?
DENI: We already have the Diamondback card set and a stuffed toy. We are setting up Cerebus t-shirts with somebody who will be doing two or three different shirts.
DAVE: We thought an Aardvarkmobile would be nice. It hasn't been done before.
DENI: Or a Cerebus video game or a Dungeons & Dragons type of Cerebus game except we don't understand it and we're not sure that we really want someone else to set up a game because there is no way of doublechecking what they do.
DAVE: Color portfolios. . . .
CS: Cerebus is also cutting up on radio.
DENI: A small public radio station in Minneapolis has adapted the first three issues of *Cerebus*, each as a 15-minute segment of a science-fiction series.
DAVE: And we're going to do color portfolios!
CS: We keep hearing a rumor about that somewhere. Why?
DAVE: I don't know. I don't really like to talk about it.
CS: It's getting late, we're out of coffee, it's page 62, we could end here.
DAVE: The portfolio is 40 plates. Full color.



PHOTOS: JOHN CLAYTON

Deni and Dave Sim. She publishes. He creates. And together, they have helped change the face of alternative comics.

For $10. We're doing a portfolio of storyboards for a proposed *Cerebus* animated feature I'm initiating as a one-hour TV special. That's one reason for the low price tag. I want to make sure that fans get a good value for their money and consequently, there will be a series of portfolios, maybe eight, which will eventually be a fair chunk of what the animated project will be. And my ambition is to do an animated film which doesn't have a single heartwarming moment.

Below: In the acclaimed issue #36, Cerebus and Jaka, the woman who loves him, meet again in a story Dave Sim says shows "comic readers what 20 pages which takes place in one setting really can be." Note the backgrounds—which appear and disappear throughout the story in harmony with its emotional content.

CS: Are you going to kill Bambi's mother?
DAVE: I want to do for Warner Brothers animation what Don Bluth is doing for Disney — to bring back that lost style. I want an animator who feels the same way, and I'll turn the project over to him as long as he understands what I'm saying and can tell me, "I'll put it on film for you." I'm not interested in going to a studio like Disney and having them impose their own vision on Cerebus as they did with *Pinocchio*. It has to be my story, the way I conceived it.
CS: What's in the future?
DAVE: Well, I'm not going to draw Cerebus anymore—which is why there's not going to be 250-odd issues.
CS: George Tuska might be interested in taking over.
DAVE: Well, that's good. We can get George to do it, Marty Pasko to write it. Just kidding. Really. The future for Dave and Deni Sim is to stay as far away from the craziness in New York as possible—stay sane, stay in a city where nobody really knows who we are.
DENI: And I want to do more publishing.
DAVE: We like visiting a lot, going to different places. This tour is great. Wake up in Philadelphia, go onto Baltimore, Silver Spring, then Richmond, then here, there.
DENI: It's fun. You don't have to see these people all the time, so you can have a really good time!
DAVE: You can *lie* about what you're doing, who you are.
CS: And the color portfolio doesn't exist, eh, Dave?
DAVE: Well, you have to have something to talk about. If I said, "I only do *one* book, that's all I have time to do," you'd say, "Who do you think you are, Wendy Pini?"
DENI: He's kidding, Wendy.
DAVE: Right—let's say goodnight, Deni.
DENI: Good night, Deni. ■

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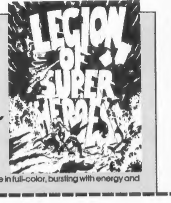

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Creating

(Continued from page 48)

moving the camera angle are elementary but Curt's been doing it for so long that he sometimes overlooks it. As Curt keeps aging, he kept making Superman and Clark Kent older too, forgetting for the moment that they were supposed to be frozen at 29. It is incumbent on the editor to remind the writer and artist that a certain direction must be adhered to."

When it's time to make those changes, usually in terms of a comic's direction, they have to be distinctive so the fans will notice. When Schwartz inherited *Batman* and *Detective* in 1964, he decided on a "new" look and so assigned *Detective* to Carmine Infantino. Wein went for a totally different look in *Wonder Woman* when the higher–ups said the personnel were available.

"I was reluctant to go along with a look that the readers perceived as bad. It's unfair on the readers' part to assume my editing it wouldn't change anything but I didn't have much alternative at the time. I was told other talent wasn't available. They finally said, 'Look, we've got to do something to help improve the sales.' I put Roy Thomas and Gene Colan on the book. Gene, who I think is marvelous, wasn't really suited for *Wonder Woman*, it wasn't right for him. Gene was chosen specifically because he was the furthest away, stylistically, from Jose Delbo that I could find. I wanted people to pick up the book and go, 'Oh, it's different.'"

Other changes that editors must be concerned about involve the actual dynamics of the DC universe. Although plans are underway for the *History of the DC Universe* to finally decide what is part of the DC canon and what is not, all along editors have had to concern themselves with the consistency of powers and characterizations as they appear book to book.

The project, researched by Pete Sanderson and to be written by Wein and Wolfman, will eventually involve the major writers and editors in making the decisions as to what will stay and what is thrown out. For now though, the editors are trying their best to keep things as accurate as possible.

"As a fan," Wein offers, "I am somebody who is interested in continuity and as a creative person, hates to be constrained by it. I think there is a tendency among not only the readership but the people involved in creating the books to be picky. I think that things that have been repeated constantly are obligatory. Yes, Superman comes from Krypton; yes, he gets his powers from a yellow sun; yes, a red sun makes him weak and he eats brownies every Friday. No, his glasses do not make people see Clark as a different person. One story should not change an entire series. You have to be true to the spirit of the series without having to worry about every single little thing that happened in the course of 25 years.

"You need to give us liberty and leeway to do more stories. If we get more and more bound by what's come in the past there won't be much going on in the future.

"Part of the problem with the industry, the people who created the Silver Age 25, almost 30 years ago, never expected it to go on this long. Do you think Stan Lee would have had Reed Richards and Ben Grimm fight in World War II if he knew 25 years later that would make them over 50 years old?"

The offices at DC and Marvel are filled with freelancers coming and going, editors running from door to door to consult with one another and get help. Some, like Wein's, are natural magnets for people to congregate. From all the activity, comic series get plotted, heroes created and supporting characters married or killed off. Orchestrating the entire mess are the editors who creatively guide the discussions and "bull" sessions along practical lines so the truly worthy ideas get used. Schwartz much prefers to brainstorm with his writers all day long and wouldn't have it any other way.

Maybe editing comics isn't a high profile position as is writer or penciller, but that's the one job that takes the pieces and puts them together to create the finished product, the one people pick up off the shelves and take home to read. ■

Grell

(Continued from page 53)

her bath, Travis Morgan had slept once and ate twice. The line was printed as slept twice and ate twice."

Later, there was a tale in which Morgan returned earthside. When he arrived back in Skataris, his helmet was covered in spider-webs. This visual shorthand for passage of time was used by Grell in an entirely different context. "A friend of mine was a race driver and he was in two races one night with maybe a half-hour between them. When he came back to his car for the second race, a spider had spun a complete web from the steering wheel to the seat. Spiders spin their webs very fast. I got the idea from that incident. Everyone else began thinking there was a time warp.

"I'm here to tell you right now that time progresses down there the *same* way it progresses up here."

BURROUGHS & STARSLAYER

Grell admits that Skataris is not an original idea. In fact, he points out that through research, 13 books were written before the turn-of-the-century on the subject of the hollow Earth. Much of the inspiration comes from Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories of Pellucidar and a book aptly titled *The Hollow Earth*. "My setting, I have to say, is inspired by Pellucidar. I've read almost everything Burroughs has ever written and I found it very fascinating."

This long-time fascination with the work of Burroughs goes back to childhood and Grell says he read all the Tarzan books at least three times and became a big fan. "When the Secret Service did a security check on me while I was in the Air Force," Grell recalls, "They said, 'Mike Grell is Tarzan.' There was a time when you could have easily found me by asking for Tarzan in my hometown. I still do a halfway decent imitation of the yell."

When United Features Syndicate called to ask Grell if he was interested in picking up a strip, little did he know that Tarzan was one of the possibilities. Grell was recommended by Archie Goodwin, who continues to write for comic strips in addition to his duties at Epic Comics. After samples were approved by Danton Burroughs, president of ERB, Inc., Grell began working on the strip, something he calls "a natural."

His work began appearing with the July 19, 1981 Sunday page—the dailies remain reprints—and he is now renegotiating a contract. "They're paying me so little, I lose money every time I draw a strip," Grell explains. "I will continue on the strip if they meet my financial demands, otherwise I pull the pen."

Grell has picked up on concept of a man displaced in time and/or space as seen in *Warlord*, *Tarzan* and even *Starslayer*. Grell says that *Starslayer* was created over four years ago as the opposite of *Warlord*. Torin MacQuillon, Torin of the sword, was plucked out of Earth's ancient history by Tamara and charged with helping save the future of the solar system.

For quite a while, Grell wanted to do the comic and DC was interested until the implosion of 1978, forcing them to cut back their line about 50 percent. Then, Mike Gold left DC and began thinking about forming his own company, which has evolved into First Comics. For a while, Grell kept holding the character back, waiting for the word from Gold. "At one point, he called and said, 'I'm on my way to sign the deal with the distributor. Start the book. Twenty minutes later, he called back and said, 'Stop work, they backed out,'" Grell says. Finally, Pacific Comics got into the publishing field (see article on page 20) and offered Grell a deal. Soon, *Starslayer* joined Jack Kirby's *Captain Victory* as the premiere titles from that fledgling company.

The original deal with Pacific called for six issues and when that obligation was fulfilled, Grell received a better offer from Gold, now that First Comics was ready to go. Grell says that First's deal beats everyone else's by offering a substantial page rate and royalties from the first issue sold. Most others either use the page rate against royalties or wait until 100,000 copies have sold before paying royalty.

But all that is behind Grell now, he's concentrating on *Sable*. And that's enough. He recently moved from Wisconsin to Idaho and with his wife Sharon, is making life as good as possible. Sharon has helped Grell as a sounding board, a business manager and even a letterer on *Starslayer* and *Tarzan*. "We always sit down and discuss the storylines, the different aspects of the characters and what their personalities are like. To a large extent, she's been responsible for a great deal of input on the major and minor points of character development.

"One thing I want to add about Sharon: there have been a lot of nights where I was working on a 24 or 36 hour push. She was right there in the studio all the time. When she couldn't stay awake, she would sack out on the floor and stay with me. I tell you, just having someone around to keep you reminded that you're not the only one alive sure helps a lot.

"I think the most important thing she's done for me is that she has taught me, 'It's OK if you fail as long as you try. If you try, nine times out of 10, you're going to succeed.'"

Grell has been dabbling with painting when he finds the spare time. He says that in 10 or 15 years, he would like to devote most of his time to painting nature and wildlife, something that has caught his fancy recently. Today, though, he's busily dreaming up new missions for Sable to accept and sits back to watch where his earlier creations are headed. For now, all is right with Mike Grell's world. ■

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Ed. Notes

In this issue's "Word Balloons," Editor Bob Greenberger urges you to read and support alternative, independently published comics, and bemoans the quantity of sameness to be found in the Marvel/DC universes. I agree with his sentiments, but there's an even better reason to buy the direct-sales-alternatives: some of the most exciting work being done today can be found there, *and* only there, because the creative people involved will no longer work for the major houses.

In January, I purchased three new books from three different independent publishers that illustrate my point perfectly. I brought *Scorpio Rose #1*—$1.50 from Dean and Jan Mullaney's Eclipse Comics, printed on white baxter paper; *Silver Star #2*—$1.00 from Bill and Steve Schanes' Pacific Comics, printed on Mando paper; and from the "new boys on the block," Rick Obadiah and Mike Gold's First Comics, I got *E-MAN #2 (#1* was sold out!). It costs $1.00 and is printed on the same Mando-stock.

I found each of them highly entertaining, somewhat surprising and definitely value for the money.

Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers' *Scorpio Rose* (nee *Madame Xanadu*) is an excellent creation with a really good origin story. My only gripe is Englehart's strange use of stilted Shakespearean constructions for a band of East European gypsies. Lines like: "Oh, do thee relax, good sir," and ". . . if thy meaning's also that thou hast no trust in me . . . why then hast thou come?" are strained and unnecesary. On the other hand, perhaps the most compelling writing in the issue is not in the story at all. It is the stranger-than-fiction true story of how *Scorpio Rose* came to be, in Englehart's introductory editorial remarks on the inside front cover.

And speaking of interesting reading, you must see what Marty Pasko and Joe Staton are doing with the newly resurrected *E-MAN*. Not only is it zany and entertaining, it is potent satire which, were it not for the First Amendment, might have the darling boys in a spot of hot water. (Although, lead time being what it is, by the time you read this editorial, lawsuits may have already been filed. But don't worry, guys, free speech is still protected in this country. Although, lead time being what it is . . . .) Anyhow, my only complaint about the issue is the cover which, *I think*, is also a satire—but mainly a mish-mosh.

Oh, before I forget, there's also a very good back-up story in *Scorpio Rose*, "Dr. Orient," by Frank Lauria and Marshall Rogers, and a wonderfully bizarre one-page "Mike Mist Minute Mist-ery" by Max Collins and Terry Beatty in *E-MAN*.

Which brings us to *Silver Star*, Jack Kirby's new opus from the same people who published *Captain Victory*. Right out in front, this one is better than *Victory*. For one thing, we're not dealing with aliens, but rather genetically altered humans. The storyline is apocalyptic and pure Kirby, but the weight of the subject matter is nicely counterbalanced by Kirby's excellent, fast-paced storytelling. It has none of the magic and mysticism of *Scorpio Rose*, and none of the hysterical buffoonery and biting satire of *E-MAN*, but *Silver Star* has the promise of another all-out Kirby epic, like the "New Gods" saga, and comics like that one have been few and far between.

So get down to your local comics shops and do some intelligent consuming. There are all sorts of surprises waiting for you, and best of all, there are new treats from old friends.

Howard Zimmerman/Editor-in-Chief

To Be Continued...

RETURN OF THE JEDI, perhaps this year's most eagerly awaited movie, will premiere in comic book form early in May and we cornered writer Archie Goodwin and artist Al Williamson to talk about how they adapt a film into a comic. What's also interesting is that the team produces the *Star Wars* comic strip too. Tune in for some interesting conversation (but no plot details) and lots of color artwork.

FIRST COMICS burst onto the scene in December and has been going strong ever since, with more titles and talent signing up all the time. Kim Howard Johnson went to their Illinois offices for the lowdown on where the company came from and where they will be going. We'll be running a contest with First and for a clue, carefully read *Warp #4*, page 15.

DENNIS THE MENACE is one of the most beloved comic strips in the world. Creator Hank Ketcham recently returned to America after nearly 20 years in Europe and we spoke with him about his lively career and the little trouble-maker we have all come to know so well.

ROCK & ROLL may be the surprise movie of the summer season. The animated feature from Canada features songs from Blondie's Debbie Harry, Lou Reed, Earth, Wind & Fire and many others. We'll present a full-color preview of this futuristic film.

PLUS: Around the World begins a two-part look at the comics of Italy . . . Romance Comics get the once-over from Joe Orlando, Dick Giordano, Carol Kalish and others . . . and a pictorial preview of *DC's Batman and the Outsiders!*

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